FOR THE SOUL OF RAFAEL

MARAH ELLIS RYAN

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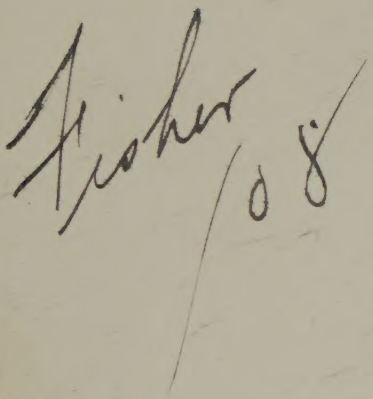

"Because of One Little White Vampire."

FOR THE SOUL OF RAFAEL

BY

MARAH ELLIS RYAN

AUTHOR OF "TOLD IN THE HILLS"
"THE BONDWOMAN" ETC.

RCC

WITH MANY ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN EXPRESSLY FOR THIS BOOK
BY
HAROLD A. TAYLOR

DECORATIVE DESIGNS BY
RALPH FLETCHER SEYMOUR

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MAR 17 '52

Á MIS AMIGOS DE CALIFORNIA

que siempre me han prestado su ayuda con aquella bonded que les es caracteristica.

M. E. R.

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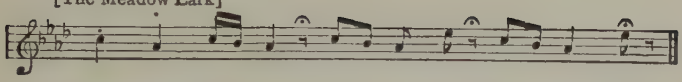
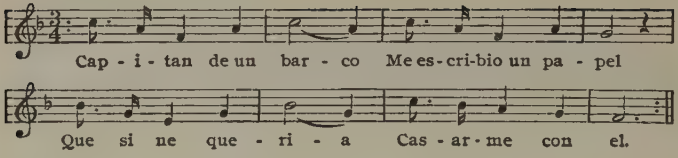


Capitan de un Barco.



FOR THE SOUL OF RAFAEL

CHAPTER I

VER the valley of the Mission of the Tragedies, the grass was knee-deep in March that year. The horses galloping from the mesa trail down to Boca de la Playa (the mouth of the ocean) were fat and sleek and tricky as they ran neck and neck past the corral of the little plain, and splashed in glee through the San Juan River, where it ends its short run from the Sierras to the Pacific.

Where the west trail hugged the hill, two men sat their broncos, watching that no strays break from the mesa above; and beyond the cross on Avila's hill, other vaqueros guarded El Camino Real (the road royal), lest in the whirl and dash of the round-up rebels might break from the open and a stampede undo all the riding since dawn of day.

High above on the western cliff a giant head of cactus reared infernal arms and luminous bloom. One immense clump threw a shadow across the cliff

road where it leaves the river plain and winds along the cañon to the mesa above the sea,— the road over which in the old days the Mission Indians bore hides to the ships and flung them from the cliffs to the waiting boats below.

A man stood back of the cactus watching with tireless eyes the dividing of the herds and the quick work of the vaqueros as their excited mustangs raced for a stray or a rebel from the ranks. A dark serape was at his feet, the dust of the roads on his face, and when he removed his sombrero to light a cigarro in its shelter, there was disclosed a great shock of black hair worn unusually long, and matching in unkemptness the full beard covering his face almost to his black velvety eyes.

They were the one youthful feature in an otherwise weather-worn visage, and at the sound of horse hoofs on the road, they opened wider, listening, alert, yet he did not turn to look whence the sounds came. Instead, he dropped silently to the serape, crushed the end of the cigarro against a cactus leaf, and waited, as still and as safe from detection as a lizard of the mesa in a sage thicket.

He could see clearly the face of Don Antonio, the major-domo, and instinctively his right hand reached for his gun. Then he shrugged his shoulders at his

own folly, and bent his head to listen. Don Antonio was speaking Americano to a man riding beside him, and the man behind the cactus frowned impatiently,—the villanous tongue was an added grievance. A few rebellious animals had made a dash for the cliff, and Don Antonio waved his sombrero and ranged his horse across the road. His companion did the same, and to give the vaqueros time to cross the river after them, the two stood guard in the shadow of the cactus, and rolled cigarros and smoked leisurely, while the horsemen, in jingling spurs and all the bravery of the Mexican riders' outfit, circled and lassoed the pick of the herd for the Apache work of the government in the desert lands.

"It is quicker done than it was a year ago," the American remarked approvingly, "and the horses are in better condition. If you can let us have the five hundred from the La Paz ranges, there should be no trouble about making up the other five hundred from the San Mateo."

"Not any, señor," agreed Don Antonio, "I send a man down to have them round-up for next week. You no want that they begin sooner than that?"

"To-morrow," returned the other with smiling decision.

"To-morrow! Holy Maria and José! You will

cut out the fiesta and the barbecue always given for the army men? Señor Bryton, the Don Miguel and Don Rafael Arteaga will feel offend if you refuse their hospitality except for the little—little while the horse herd is arranged for."

"Sorry to offend the young men," observed the other. "But since Don Miguel is ranging in some other part of California, and your Don Rafael is in Mexico getting married or making love,—which is it?—I reckon they will not miss us much."

"No, señor, it is not to marry down there, only to make it all arrange. His mother, the Doña Luisa, is there in Mexico since San Pascual; but Doña Luisa will be more old and crippled than she is now, before she lets Don Rafael be marry outside her own Mission."

"So they come back here for the ceremony?"

"Sure! Doña Luisa she marry Don Vicente, here in San Juan Capistrano. It is here he have the big trouble with the padre, and the padre put the curse on him that long time ago. It is here that he is brought back dead from San Pascual. And now when the sons have make much trouble, all are dead but two, and when Doña Luisa, who was so proud, has only Indian grandchildren, she wants to marry Rafael to a señorita who is half a nun, that the curse may be

lifted. She think that girl do more to keep him from walking in Miguel's shoes than prayers to the saints can do; and it may be,—who knows? I hear you talking of the padre's curse to the Alcalde, so I know you hearing the story."

"Um—something of church property south of here, wasn't it?" remarked the American. "Yes, I remember. There goes a mare that is a beauty for a mustang."

"Some few years, and you no getting that strong, wild stock some more," he observed. "Miguel and Rafael want English stallions and such other breeds. They will have English stock and American customs. The saints keep Doña Luisa from hearing them all. I mean no discourtesy, señor, but she is an old woman now, and left her home because she would not live in your government. She comes back for duty and the marriage; but the old never change, señor, and she is hating it till she die."

The American cast his eyes northward where the heights of San Jacinto stood guard over the beautiful valley. Willows marked the course of Trabuco Creek and San Juan River, and on the plateau between them gleamed the ruined dome of the old mission, a remnant of beauty such as the ranging American meets with in Latin lands, seldom in his own, and admires,

and wonders if it was worth while, and drifts away again, but never quite forgets.

Yellow-white it gleamed like an opal in a setting of velvety ranges under turquoise skies. About its walls were the clustered adobes of the Mexicans, like children creeping close to the feet of the one mother; and beyond that the illimitable ranges of mesa and valley, of live-oak groves and knee-deep meadows, of countless springs and cañons of mystery, whence gold was washed in the freshets; and over all, eloquent, insistent, appealing, the note of the meadow-lark cutting clearly through the hoof-beats of the herd and the calls of the vaqueros.

"I think I should hate it, too," he said at last. "They lived like kings and made their own laws in those days. After being a queen of all this, it would be hard to be subject to new forms."

"That is it, señor, she never get used to like the American flag. That why she want always that Don Rafael marry South, a good Catholic, and a señorita of Mexico. She only living for that, they say. Now when it is done she die in peace."

"And Rafael, how will he manage his American deals when—"

Don Antonio shrugged his shoulders doubtfully. "Who knows? I glad I living my young life in

other days. The fences have make ruin of the country in the north; after a while it is down here all the same. All cut up in little gardens. Who knows?"

The American restrained a smile as he thought of the sixty-five miles they had ridden across, and only one little German colony where fence or hedges were in evidence. For the rest all was fenced on the east by the mountains and on the west by the sea. On the north the Santa Barbara range would perhaps serve as a barricade, and south even the Mexican line raised no obstacle to roving herds.

"The fences will not come in our day, and it is all now to be a pleasure ground for your gay Don Rafael."

"Not so much of a pleasure ground as it looks, señor," observed Don Antonio dryly. "The same curse works still. It is good he marries a convent girl; it takes the prayers of Doña Luisa, and a saint besides, to clear these ranges of Barto Nordico, el Capitan."

The man on the serape shrugged his shoulders and lifted his head, resting it on his hands to listen better.

"Nordico? Oh, yes! the man with an eye for good horses."

"If it were only an eye," grumbled Don Antonio, "but the devil seems to have a hundred hands, and

his reata touches only the first stock on the Arteaga ranches."

"Not only the Arteagas', I suppose?"

"Oh, you not hearing that?" and the older man's tone expressed surprise. "It going with the curse, maybe, we not knowing. Old Don Vicente have the brother Ramon, but Vicente buy up all Ramon's land some way. Ramon goes crazy mad, *loco*, on that account. And then his son, Barto, he study for the priest, that is when the war comes, and he is only little yet. He running away from school to fight; but all he can do is to carry the letters, he is so little and can ride so like the devil. He never is content to the American flags, no more than Doña Luisa, so he just keeping on to fight, and the government no getting him."

"Do they try?" asked the American.

"Do they — do they try? Since he joined Juan Flores, one dozen men in Capistrano have the sword cut or the bullet mark, who have gone to try for that reward. It is good money, but no one getting it. He is a devil."

"But I don't understand. You make him out an Arteaga, yet he is called Nordico?"

"Oh, he hating the Arteagas, so he taking his mother's name. He take the government mail

sometimes, and he takes the Arteaga horses always, and no one ever finds him any place. While men follow his trail for the mountains, he is out in a boat on the sea. The saints send that he does not meet the marriage gifts of Don Rafael."

The man behind the cactus fairly held his breath.

"Whew! would he attack the Mission or the town?"

"It would not be the first time," returned Antonio, "but it is of the bride-chests on the journey that I speak. Sixty miles of land they must cover from San Diego, and they cost more than a herd of horses."

"Rafael can replace the gifts," observed the American, "so long as his bandit cousin does not kidnap the bride; but even that, I suppose, might be done in this land of lonely ranges."

The man under the cactus nodded and showed his teeth in an appreciative smile. He had met good fortune for his long vigil; it was a day of luck, and he crossed himself.

The vaqueros had circled the rebellious animals, and headed them back.

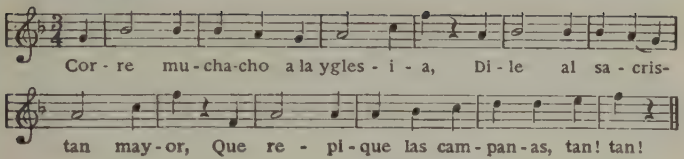
"It is true, the horses are in better condition this year," conceded the major-domo as they watched the horses loping along the river side. "Do you send them all together, or by the five hundred, across the range, Señor Bryton?"

"By the five hundred, I think the lieutenant said," replied Bryton. "It is not easy to feed more in one bunch on the journey."

The man behind the cactus arose stealthily and stretched his arms as the hoof-beats grew more faint.

"Señor Bryton — eh?" and he shrugged his shoulders contentedly. "The clever Bryton who put us off the track last year and took the stock by the north! This time he will not be so clever. Still, he gives a man ideas in the head,— may he have an easy death for that! Rafael's good friend who picks the good horses for the good government!"

La Viuda.



CHAPTER II

"MEN make plans, and the devil makes other plans — and the devil's plan has always the luck with it."

Don Antonio had expressed himself thus to the army men, who fumed and fretted at delays incident to the funeral ceremonies of Miguel Arteaga, for whom the Mission bells clanged in the gray of a morning, and the word went out that he lay trampled into the dust of the Santa Ana ranch. A thousand head of stampeding cattle had gone over him, and the younger brother — the handsome Rafael — was now the head of the Arteaga family. And with half the horses selected for the government, the work had stopped short. There was no head to anything now until Rafael arrived. In vain the army men

swore, and went farther south to secure mounts for the regiment. They had to come back to San Juan, and then it was that Keith Bryton, with his knowledge of the people and of the country, came to their aid.

He heard that the debonair Rafael had landed at San Pedro the day of the death, and had quietly lost himself from the dismal ceremonies awaiting him in his own province. Miguel could not be seen; what use was it to witness the howling mob of Indian retainers?

Bryton, knowing something and surmising more of the situation, held the army men with some promise to "fix things," and secretly despatched a trusted vaquero with a letter to San Pedro, allowing the new heir for his return just the time necessary for the next ship to come into the harbor, and the extra day's drive from Los Angeles. In the meantime a personal letter giving orders to Don Antonio to hand over the stock as per contract was needed badly in San Juan, if Don Rafael ever cared again for government favors.

The vaquero rode back in forty-eight hours with the order. The work of rounding-up began over again, and only Keith Bryton and Don Antonio knew how it had come about.

Slowly affairs began to assume their usual routine. People began to talk of other things; and only Doña Teresa, the widow of Miguel, continued to go daily to

the dark old chapel back of the Mission dining-room, and kneel in prayer before the wooden saints in the niches. She sat in the patio of Juan Alvara's house, and stared listlessly from one square of tiling in the pavement to another. The priest had just left her after the perfunctory words of solace, and was refreshing himself with a glass of brandy preparatory to a game of *malia*. The week had been one of trial; it always is so when the death is one of accident—no one is ready.

The Doña Teresa had been a pretty girl in the days when Miguel Arteaga serenaded her endlessly, and her family had insisted that the marriage should not be postponed to add to their sleepless nights. One year—two years, and the serenades were a thing of a former life, and so was fat Teresa's beauty. From the willows was brought again the Indian girl whose two children had been christened in his name. She looked after the servants who cooked for the vaqueros. Her manner was ever quiet and submissive to Doña Teresa, who accepted her as better than any of the others of the same class. Doña Teresa had no children, and envied though she was not jealous of Aguada of the smoke-black eyes and the babies. And it was Aguada who came to Doña Teresa in the patio, undid her bonnet-strings, and bathed her face and hands with cool water.

Past the veranda of Juan Alvara, at San Juan, all

the world of Southern California found its way. There was a tavern down the street, where the stages stopped between Los Angeles and San Diego, but Juan Alvara's house was the one dwelling where distinguished travellers were entertained, after the hospitality of the padres at the Mission was a thing of the past. It was up to this veranda Keith Bryton rode from the second round-up at Boca de la Playa. He was tired and dusty, and accepted gratefully the wine for which the old man sent when he saw his guest approaching.

Alvara did not usually like "Gringos"; but at the time the Juan Flores bandits were holding up the town for ransom, it was Keith Bryton who had gathered a posse of men, including the sheriff, and headed them again for San Juan. Grain-sacks were piled along the roof of the Mission as a barricade, and behind them some riflemen guarded, as best they could, the several families who had fled to the walls of the church for protection.

Only one store had been burned, and one storekeeper killed, when the help came—thanks to Bryton, and that one ride broke down all barriers for the young Gringo in San Juan. He now never rode past Alvara's veranda without a halt for a glass of wine, or a chat, or even that best test of understanding, a rest in silence together, looking out across the river to the blue shadows of the hills.

This day as the young man sat smoking in such silence, viewing idly the passing Indians whose dark faces were lit by the rosy glow of the lowering sun, and watching the circling doves whose white wings caught flashes of pink from pink clouds above, the older man, regarding his thoughtful face, asked after a quiet interval, "What is it, my friend?"

The handsome bronzed young fellow stretched wide his arms with a great sigh, and laughed shortly.

"Foolishness, Don Juan, much foolishness. I was homesick for a something I never knew, so I left Los Angeles and came here to find it. Can you understand so crazy a thing as that?"

The old man nodded slowly.

"It is a girl—no?"

The young man laughed again, without mirth.

"Which of them?" and Bryton made a gesture toward a group of dark faces across the plaza. "There is pretty Lizetta, Teresa; and if one wants the other sort, there is Chola Martina staring at us both under her mantilla."

"It is you she stares at. The Lieutenant danced with her last night. He is just off the ranges, so she is to-day crazy over the Americanos. No—it is not any of such girls you are for."

"I reckon not," agreed the young fellow. "I think

it is just the atmosphere, and perhaps the old monastery. The pictures of Mexican towns paint themselves on the memory and stay there. Were you ever in Old Mexico, Don Juan?"

"Not I; never have I been a travelled man. But you—?"

"I was down there a year ago," answered Bryton, looking hard at the hills. "I found a town in a valley like this,—there were just the same sort of 'dobes, and the same sort of big church walls,—only it was a nuns' cloister, instead of a deserted monastery."

"And—?"

"I'll never go back, but—I'll never forget it! That old broken wall, and Moorish chimney, and the doves—they all belong to the same sort of picture. I come here to sit and moon over them once in a while, that's all!"

The old man regarded him with shrewd, kindly eyes. He had the strain of Spanish blood, condoning many follies of youth.

"So!" he said, kindly. "Thou comest here to dance with the girls of San Juan, that the other girl may be forgotten? Ai—yi!—these other sweethearts are fellows who make much trouble!—so?"

"It is something more than a sweetheart keeps me away," remarked the young fellow after a slight

pause. "A mere sweetheart is not such a barricade; most of us are perverse enough to think it rather an incentive."

"You too, my friend?"

"Who knows?"

The old man puffed out another cigaretto and threw the stump away before he spoke.

"The wives of other men it is wise to go clear of, my friend."

Keith laughed more than the remark called for; in fact, his amusement dispelled the murky thoughts by which he had been driven to the hospitable veranda.

"True—very true; but which of us is always wise?"

Alvara made no reply to this, only shook his head, and the other, noting the perplexity of it, chuckled.

"Don't lose sleep over my depravity," he suggested. "I am no blacker than the rest of the sheep."

"Even then thou wouldst fall far short of whiteness," remarked the older man. "The padre swears that San Juan will have worse than earthquakes if there is no reform."

"That is bad," said Keith, with owl-like gravity.

"It is bad, señor—and it is true. I heard him say it but an hour ago. He was playing *malia* with old Henrico and won three pesos. He says it is wrong to

race horses on Sunday, since Jose went under and had his neck broke. José, like Miguel, had not confessed, and the padre wants money for a mass."

"Will he get it?"

"Sure. The boys will not see him stay in purgatory for thirty pesos. They are throwing dice at Don Eduardo's now, to see who will pay."

"If it was the horse of Don Eduardo, and José had ridden for him ten years, why cannot Don Eduardo pay?"

"Don Eduardo is English. The Englishmen are used to going to hell."

"They would deserve to go for that, if for nothing else," commented Bryton, as the report of a blast shook the ground, and across the plaza the air was filled with flying rock and brick and plaster; and then a great cloud of dust drifted upward as the Mexican workmen strolled back to their task of tearing down the old church of San Juan Capistrano, whose massive stone walls it had taken the padres and their neophytes so many years of toil to complete.

"Not a church equal to it in the Californias; not a church equal to it dreamed of in the States when it was being built!" and the young fellow stared moodily at the devastation of it. "Can't the bishop stop that?"

"Ten years the Church fight to get it back. They must win some day—oh, yes—sure!"

"But what will they have when the suit is won, if this is allowed to go on?"

"Who knows?" queried Alvara, placidly. "We may be in our graves, señor, and not here to see it. When Don John wants foundation for an adobe, he blows down a stone wall; when he wants walls for a well, he blows down the arches of the patio, until bricks enough fall. It is quicker than to burn new ones."

"But the padre?"

"There is the man who is padre of San Juan Capistrano in these days," said Juan Alvara, briefly.

A man was coming up the middle of the road, his boots wet and muddy from irrigating-ditches, a short black pipe between his teeth. He halted to chaffer with an Indian woman who carried a basket of fish from the sea.

Contemptuously viewing the modest sea bass, he said: "Fish only a foot long—what good are they? Who is fool enough to buy such?"

"It is not to sell, father. Tia Concepcion, who is much sick, ask for these; they are to give, for she is sick."

"Humph! a sick woman to eat ten fish! They will be sending for me in the middle of the night for

prayers. You go to my cook, and leave seven of these with him in the kitchen for my supper."

The Indian lowered her head and passed on to the Mission. The padre crossed the plaza to where the group of girls stood chatting at the open gate of a patio. At his approach they fell silent, but a few brief words scattered them quickly toward their several homes, and the man of the church tramped on, the dust of the road sticking to his wet boots.

"All what brings a price and is overlooked by the Englishmen, this padre will dig up," said Juan Alvara. "He is getting rich from many fields."

"Many fields?"

"Many fields—the church, the little ranch he has picked up, and the game of *monte* or *malia*. He is the new sort of priest they send these days from Catalonia. No one in San Juan confesses now until Padre Sanchez comes past. If the church wins, the Mission will be blown down all the same, so long while some one pay four bits a load for brick. All is much changed. Father Sanchez is another kind—a holy man and of God."

Alvara lifted his sombrero reverently.

"The vaqueros coming with the band of horses from the beach soon," he observed. "We will go to the corrals, and help you to forget the girl—no?"

"I'm not so anxious to forget, I reckon—the girl is only a sort of dream girl. This trip was not so much to forget a girl as to—you remember Teddy, my half-brother?"

"Don Teddy? Sure—he was the life of the valley when he came to San Juan."

"Yes. Well, Teddy's married; he has married the woman who, you said, had the face of some angel."

"Not Angela, the señora who is Don Eduardo's English cousin?"

The other nodded his head grimly.

"But—" the old man stared at him sharply, and then suddenly recovered himself.

"Teddy says his wife wants to come down here while he is in Mexico," grunted Bryton. "What the devil can I do with her if she comes now?"

"You are a relative now—is it not so?" asked the old man, with an affectionate smile. "She is your sister."

"Sister be—" If he meant blessed, he did not look it as he tramped the veranda. "I start just the same for the south ranch to-morrow. If she comes, she can go to Mac's tavern, or to the Mission with the ghosts!"

"That would not be good to do," said Alvara seriously. "The wife of your brother must come

to my house. Teresa, the widow of Miguel, is here; her English is not anything, but it is good that your sister have a lady with her in the house. Teresa, she feel very bad. Don Teddy's wife was once a widow; she will understand."

"Will it make many changes in the business—his death?" asked Bryton.

"It will lose the ranches more quickly to the English and the Americans," stated the older man. "Rafael will have all the money now, and—it is good that he gets married quick. The girl—she is Estevan's daughter—she likes no English—so they say."

"Oh!—Estevan's daughter—Estevan's! I heard a queer story of that name once—a queer story!"

"He left when the Americanos came to California. Always he fought against the Americanos. He was a strong soldier, and he die there in Mexico, and all his money is for the girl if she marry; for the convent if she not marry at all."

"It was another Estevan," said Keith. "It was a story of an old Aztec temple that would make your hair curl! Might have been a relation of your soldier Estevan."

"There may be the same name in Mexico, but Felipe Estevan had no brothers."

Keith rolled a cigarro, and did not notice that the

Doña Angela

old man's hand trembled as he did the same, and that his eyes were striving in vain to appear careless.

"My Spanish was pretty queer those days, and I did not grasp the details of the story. You find all sorts of half-buried towns and temples and palaces in the country—queer places no one on earth can tell who built. But the temple was a plain fact. Stone-work cut for all the world like that," he added, pointing to the gray Mission ruin. "Zig-zags on the cornices and Aztec suns just the same over the portals. There were great old walls left, but no roof. Trees grew all through it, and right in the open was something like a bench covered with queer Indian figures of fight, and sacrifices, and the only one I ever saw down there carved out of marble."

"Yes—a bench of marble!" Alvara was listening intently, nodding his head, and forgetting to smoke.

"Well, an old miner down there told me a lurid story of the last Indian sacrifice offered up on that altar. He found the body and helped to bury it—the name was Estevan."

"It is a good name," said the old man.

"Fine! but wherever he had lived he was used to a different sort of woman from the one he met at the old temple. She was of pure Spanish and Aztec stock. The women in those temples don't usually appear to

count, but she came of a long line of Aztec priests. After the Catholic Church got hold of them, they became Catholic priests instead of Aztec ones, and served the same God under a different name."

"So?" remarked Alvara.

"It seems Estevan drifted into the country with considerable money—cattle-man, I think; anyway, he had a ranch of some sort—and fell dead in love with the sister of one of these hereditary priests, and they were married. The old miner said a lot of queer old Indians gathered from the Lord only knew where, and had a great bonfire and crazy dances and ceremonies at the temple the night she was married. They were waiting for a new priest of their own old religion to be born some day and every marriage in that family was of interest."

"Well?"

"Well—I don't know how to make clear that there are wives in the world to whom brown girls in the willows are—well—they are absolutely taboo to the husbands—understand?"

Alvara nodded silently.

"This Estevan was not used to women like that. He was crazy over the priest's sister till he got her, and then he was like many other men—he went back to the brown girls."

"And then?"

"Then that old Aztec tribe seemed to hear of it on the wind—no one knows. A brown girl was caught by the Indians one night, her long hair cut short to her head; and the next day Estevan was found tied on that altar with the same hair plaited into ropes. The heart had been cut from the body and rested in a little urn or vase carved in the stone of the wall. There were no other mutilations or signs of cruelty—it was more like a pagan ceremony than anything else. The girl's hair was the only clue as to what the cause might have been."

"And the wife and the child—what did the man tell you of them?"

"Child?" Keith stared at the old man. "I did not mention a child; never heard there was one. The widow of Estevan entered a convent and was never heard of again. The old miner said the priest took charge of the property—for the Church, he supposed! I think of that old temple every time I see the cactus and Aztec sun cut in this gray-green stone of your church here; but I had forgotten the name of Estevan until you mentioned it."

"It is a good name," added Alvara again. "Felipe Estevan was wild and a fighter, but he was not a bad man in California. He had no wife, and the girls all wore beads he bought—but why not? He knew we have only one life to live here!"

SAN DIEGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

"True, señor; and the story of the tragedy made me forget poor Teddy's comedy—one I can't laugh at yet."

"Some day you ask us to a wedding, and you will forget that marriage is a madness," said Alvara.

And then Doña Teresa came slowly out on the veranda in her many folds of black. There was a hard glitter in her little black eyes, but her lips curved ever so slightly in a courteous greeting as Keith Bryton bent over her hand.

"I hear how you telling that story, señor," she remarked, pleasantly. "You think that it is good to tie a gentleman on a bench, and put his heart on a shelf—no?"

"Good? Why, it was the most ghastly heathenish thing I ever heard of. But—"

"But you Americanos think most of the women who do such things," she persisted; "you think it better than to let him live where there are the brown girls."

"Oh—señora?"

He saw that he had irrevocably damned himself in her eyes. She might speak to him courteously through a long lifetime, but one of the institutions of their pastoral life—an institution ignored by the usual guest in the land—had been referred to in a sarcastic manner, and he knew that never again could he expect the good

will of Teresa Arteaga. The allusion had been the most distant, the most unintentional, but at the first word the blood of the Mexican was arrayed against the Gringo.

"You think it well when that wife put the knife in the heart of the husband?" she continued. "(Yes, Aguada, I will have a cup of orange juice, and you may bring wine for the gentlemen.) You think your American ladies do that same thing—no?"

"Oh—the old miner never suggested that it was the woman did it—the wife!" he protested. "It was thought to be the work of the old hill tribe of Indians."

"It was not alone the Indians," stated Doña Teresa, with sudden insight. "Men would not think to tie him with girl's hair. No, it was the wife."

Alvara looked at her warningly over his glass.

"If there are such wives in Mexico, we hope they stay there," he said. "Our own Indians make trouble enough for the padre and the alcalde. The kind you tell of are best left with their tribes in the hills."

For a little longer they talked of the new horses needed for the frontier warfare, and touched upon the chance of the Capitan's stealing them before they got across the divide.

"But there is no danger even of El Capitan now,

when the Señor Don Bryton have put himself to help guard," remarked Teresa, eyeing him with a cat-like glance to discover if her sarcasm was appreciated. "We all feel very safe now in San Juan valley."

"With those brilliant army officers in town, you certainly should," he remarked, easily. "The women have always been the Capitan's best friends, and the officers are cutting him out!"

"He see too much—and he talk too much," said Teresa, as Bryton left them and walked leisurely down the road toward the inn and post-office.

"He means no harm," remarked Alvara. "The ways of the Americano are not our ways, but I like him better than the army men. He makes no scandals."

"If the army men make love to the girls, they keep quiet about it," returned Teresa. "But this man—he thinks himself too good for the 'brown girls' he talks of. Men who are too good should go to stay in the church and pray for the sinners!"

Alvara knew that no remark of Bryton's had been meant to reflect in the least on social conditions in San Juan. But what use to argue with an angry, jealous woman hunting for a grievance?

The widow of Miguel had gone through the years of jealous bitterness, the shock of Miguel's death, the

knowledge that she would inherit but a widow's share, the nerve-wrenching strain of a Mexican funeral, the sight of her husband's Indian children beside the bier; but that had all been in the midst of the people who understood—where house-servants were often legacies to the estate from brother, or uncle, or cousin. But this man, who told of a wife that revenged herself, had unconsciously flung in her face a new standard; she hated him, and hated the sort of women he knew in his own country,—the white-faced women who had snow in their blood and did not understand!

Bryton tried in vain to think what he had said to annoy Teresa so exceedingly; could it have been his inquiring as to the estate? Surely, she must know that many persons were asking the same questions. Her brother-in-law, Rafael Arteaga, was such an uncertain quantity that wagers were plentiful as to his management of the several ranches. If he left them as Miguel had done, principally to the lawyers, it might not be so bad, but Rafael's disposition to make his own bargains made older people shake their heads. His mother, Doña Luisa, was old and ill. He could have time to make very bad bargains before she could make the journey from Mexico; and even then would she be physically able to take note of business details? All those questions Bryton had heard talked over and

over. Also, the matter of the wedding,—would it be postponed because of the funeral? No one knew whether Doña Luisa and the bride were not on the way when the death occurred. Rafael had, it was understood, come ahead that he might make the preparations for their reception. A letter had also arrived saying that all things must be put in order at the dwelling-rooms of the Mission; it stated that the "donas"—the bride gifts—he had selected in Mexico might arrive any day. They had come by sea to San Pedro, and San Juan was in quite a flutter of excitement over its most important wedding in a generation.

The alcalde met Bryton, and incidentally mentioned that it was a pity the horse deal had not been held over for the week of the wedding; there would be barbecues and horse races for the latter part of the week.

"Sorry I can't stay," observed Bryton. "I'm keeping tab for the contractor on those cavalry horses, and must stay with the bunch, at least until they reach Los Angeles. Teddy has gone down into Mexico; if he stays, I may follow."

"Now that one of you boys is married, you should settle down and be a permanent citizen of some district,—what is the matter with this place?"

"It's the most beautiful valley I ever saw," agreed Bryton. "But for getting Teddy to locate sixty

miles from town—never! And as to the lady in the case, she will insist always on an audience more—"

What more it would have to be was interrupted by the clatter of the stage down the street, and on the seat beside the driver was a little woman in pale blue flounces thick with dust, and a white hat with pink rosebuds dancing and swaying with the rock of the stage.

"God—" began Bryton, and then checked himself.

The alcalde smiled.

"Mrs. Ordway—or Mrs. Teddy Bryton now—looks pretty well satisfied with this as a temporary audience," he remarked, as he sauntered across the street to his own abode. Bryton's exclamation showed that he was by no means pleased to see her, and the alcalde did not care to witness a family reunion of that sort, so he walked away smiling.

The lady waved her hand and flung a bright smile toward the half-brother of her husband. He lifted his hat, but did not move from his tracks until the horses came to a halt, brought suddenly to their haunches by the driver, who was making a showy entrance into the village for the gratification of the lady.

"I've had a delightful trip from Los Angeles—thanks to Don Rafael," she called, gaily. "I never—never expect to drive so fast again. Come and help me down!"

But the slender, handsome Mexican beside her had leaped to the ground, and, sombrero in hand, was ready to perform that service before the American reached the stage.

"You are always the day after the fair, Keith," she remarked, her eyes narrowing in a smile. "I am a thousand times obliged to Señor Arteaga!"

"It is I who am honored, señora," he returned with a sweep of the sombrero, and one brief yet steady look into her eyes. Mrs. Bryton turned away with a pleased little smile, and proceeded to shake the dust from the ruffles of her sleeve.

Keith Bryton saw both the look and the smile, and it gave a tinge of coldness to his greeting.

"How do you do, Señor Arteaga?" he remarked. "Thank you for looking after Mrs."—the word seemed hard to say—"Bryton. Are you adding stage-driving to your other accomplishments?"

Rafael Arteaga had caused too much jealousy in his day not to suspect he recognized it in the attitude of the American, whom it was something of a victory to outrival.

"Only when there is extra precious cargo on board," he said, meaningly. "American ladies are rare in San Juan. I was the only one present to show our appreciation of such a visit."

"But I am not an American—never in this world!" she insisted. "It was only the accident of marriage took me to your Mexican America. I was born in London, and am a subject of the Queen! Don't ever fancy me an American!"

"Few people will make that mistake," said Bryton, dryly. "I suppose you know that your cousin and his wife are not here?"

"Oh, yes, I discovered that through Señor Arteaga when I was part way down. But he tells me the army men are here, and that there are always dances, horse races, and a general festival while they stay. I thought it might be worth while. Señor Arteaga will look after me if you are too busy."

"With many thanks for the honor, señora."

"The barbecues are over," said Bryton; "they were rather subdued this time, because of the funeral of Don Rafael's brother. I leave with the army men to-morrow for a trip farther north, and you had best return to Los Angeles, or go to your cousin in San Diego."

She pretended to busy herself concerning a bandbox on which the cord had broken, but her little white teeth bit into her lip. Rafael had entered the post-office with the driver of the stage.

"I am not interested in San Diego," she observed.

"There must be somewhere in this row of adobes a place where a lady could stay."

"There is the tavern kept by Mac. You may be able to retain a room there alone, if no other women stop over."

"Share a room with strangers? But Don Rafael offered—"

"Don Rafael has only several adobes here, where the vaqueros eat and sleep—neither he nor his brother has lived here as a regular thing; when they do, they share the house of the major-domo, who has an Indian wife. The only privacy Don Rafael could assure you of would be to give you the key of the Mission."

"That graveyard! I must say you are not very brotherly, amigo—I learned some more words of Spanish on the way down! Well, if I must go to the awful tavern, I must! Do you suppose that villanous-looking black-and-tan in the serape will carry my boxes into the hotel? You've not said one civil word, Keith! Are Teddy and I to do the best we can without your blessing?" she asked, mockingly.

He looked at her slowly from head to foot, and back to her innocent wide-open blue eyes.

"I congratulate you," he said, briefly. "I will see

that your belongings are taken to your room. The gentleman in the serape chances to be a Mexican Don, not accustomed to carting bandboxes."

"You are not very cordial in your congratulations," she observed, as if determined to break down his cold unconcern,—to make him *say* something.

"No, I'm not," he agreed, tersely. "If Teddy had given me any idea of it, you know he would not have been a married man now."

"Oh, I knew you would be jealous, no matter whom he married," she replied; "I told him so!"

"So I supposed. But if you want to secure a room alone, you'd better not delay. Apartments are rather at a premium in San Juan."

He walked with her past the admiring group of prominent citizens toward the patio of the inn. Several of the men swept sombreros to the earth as she passed. The cousin of Don Eduardo was a lady they must show special deference to, even if she had been ugly, which she certainly was not.

Most of them envied the tall, rather good-looking fellow swinging along by her side, but he did not seem as happy in the privilege as others would have been. Alvara, seeing himself forgotten for Don Eduardo's pretty blonde cousin, smiled a little, and continued his walk alone to the corral.

"She make him forget,—but she is not the woman," he said, shrewdly.

Mrs. Bryton surveyed the coarse furnishings of the adobe with disgust as she was led to the one room where she could secure sleeping accommodation. It contained three beds with as many different-colored spreads, queer little pillows, and drawn-work on one towel hanging on a nail. The floor had once been tiled with square Mission bricks; but many were broken, some were gone, and the empty spaces were so many traps for unwary feet. Names of former occupants were scratched in the whitewashed wall. There was no window, and but one door opening on the patio and to be fastened from within by a wooden bar.

"But this—there must be something better than this!" she exclaimed.

"It is the one home where you could make yourself understood. The proprietor chances to speak English. If you come without notifying your—relatives, you must take what you find, or go on to San Diego. Your cousin is there—also his wife."

She shrugged her shoulders, and dropped wearily to a wooden bench.

"I can't ride another mile—I'm dead tired. But you don't ask why I came!"

"That is your husband's affair, not mine," he

returned. "If there is nothing else I can do for you, I will go and look after my own affairs. I start south in the morning."

"Because I came?" she demanded, with a slight smile. At sight of it his face flushed, and then the color receded while he regarded her steadily.

"Don't make any mistake about that," he suggested. "I did leave town out of impatience with another friend of mine, who was wasting his time with you. Of course he would not listen to me, and he has evidently told you. I liked him, and did not want to see him made a fool of."

"Oh, you are a silly!" she replied, unfastening her hat-string and glancing at him strangely. "It never was that man for one little minute; you, of all the men, ought to know."

"I, of all the men, have been the one who did not guess that it was Teddy," he retorted. "But since it is, there is one thing to remember,—Teddy is the best fellow in the world, and the easiest mark, and you are not to forget it!"

"I did not promise to honor and obey you!" she retorted, petulantly.

"But if you don't in this case—" he halted abruptly and walked away. Her high, sweet voice called after him, but he did not turn his head. He evidently

realized that he had come very near threatening her; and, after all, if Teddy chose to make a fool of himself for a pretty doll—

For she was undeniably pretty, and she had created quite a flurry a year before when she reached San Pedro by steamer from Mexico, a girlish widow with one child, and waited there until the English cousin of her husband, Eduardo Downing, had been notified and came up in state from his ranches, with his Mexican wife, to receive her.

One child more or less never made any difference on the ranch of Eduardo, and his wife rather liked the little white doll that was alive, for her own brown-skinned grandchildren to play with. It was better than an Indian baby—more of a novelty, so that the family affairs of the young widow were easily adjusted. She accepted invitations to visit friends of her cousin on ranches and in town. For a year she had earned the reputation of being a rather gay flirt, and she could have married several times. Keith Bryton's friends had more than hinted that she was waiting for him, and when the word went abroad that it was his half-brother, eyes were opened wide in Los Angeles. There were lifted brows, and smiles. Keith knew how the marriage would be commented upon, and he was filled with rage that she should assume at once

her care-free attitude, and fraternize with Rafael Arteaga, as she evidently had done on the ride down. And Teddy trusted her absolutely—good old Teddy, who had been infatuated from the first sight of her, and had loved without hope until lately, very lately indeed!

They had been married on the eve of his trip to Mexico. His letter, written that night, and given her to mail, had been held back by the bride until she was ready to follow it on the next stage. What mad idea had she in thus coming to the last village likely to be attractive to her? Was it to enjoy her victory? —to show him that his years of devotion to Teddy went for nothing when she chose to turn the light of her countenance his way?

Something like that it must have been,—the freakish defiance of a spoiled child. Not innocent, despite the big baby-blue eyes, but too ignorant of social conditions in this Mexican town for him to leave her to the guardianship of Rafael Arteaga when he should ride away to-morrow. The only American men in the place were unmarried. For Teddy's sake he must see that she went too. For Teddy's sake—that was the devil of it!

Rafael was lounging in the door of the post-office smoking, when Bryton emerged from the patio. There was a smile in his eyes as he noted the annoyed face of the American.

"I was waiting for you, amigo," he said, walking beside him. "I have no wish to object to the hotel of our friend Mac; but I believe it may be possible to secure a better place for señora, your sister. The widow of my brother is still here, Mac has just told me. I can turn over to them a house of plenty of room to-morrow."

"Many thanks to you, Don Rafael; but the lady will probably remain only until the next stage passes. It will not be necessary to inconvenience any of your people."

He nodded good-naturedly and left Rafael at the gate of Alvara. Teresa was yet on the veranda, interested in the one event of the day, the arrival of the stage, and the lady who was its most noticeable passenger. Alvara did not think it could have been Don Eduardo's cousin, for if so, surely Señor Bryton would have brought her at once to the Alvara home. Teresa, on the other hand, insisted that it was the English cousin; she had seen her once, and was sure that no other white woman would look so much like a white doll.

They at once appealed to Rafael to settle the question. Teresa pushed a chair toward him and suggested a glass of wine.

"Thou art tired, of course, and choked with the

dust; a desert wind blew to-day! And who was your pretty señorita? Don Juan Alvara and I could not agree; he said it could not be the cousin of Don Eduardo, or she would certainly have accepted the very kind invitation he gave her to live here while waiting for her relations."

"Invitation?" Rafael looked quickly from one to the other. "I am very sure Señora Bryton failed to receive your invitation. She confessed herself in despair if her cousin should not be here on her arrival."

"But Senor Bryton was told to bring her here."

"Oh—h!" He was silent a moment and then he smiled reassuringly. "I see how it is! He thinks she will remain over only one day and does not like to put you to trouble; but the poor lady down there alone is no doubt very uncomfortable—perhaps unhappy. If your daughters could call and see her—I would accompany them. In fact, for the cousin of Don Eduardo I will do anything I may be allowed to do."

"Sure," agreed Alvara; "it is the right thing for a lady to ask her;—if only Dolores and Madalena have not ridden to the beach—"

He went into the house to see, and Teresa looked at Rafael and shrugged her shoulders.

"Thou hast told a part, but not all, my Rafael," she said, quietly. "Is the so good Señor Bryton not

so good at last? Does he want his brother's wife to see only himself?"

"You don't like him?" he said, quickly.

"Well—if not?"

"Then we could play him a fine trick—fine! He is jealous, that is all. She rode down with me, and of course, when I learned who she was, we talked—you saw! Well, our Americano likes to be the only man. He means to send her away to-morrow,—he is so angry because she marry his brother! Of course she goes, unless we keep her. It would be a good trick to play if we could walk down there, and—"

"We will go," decided Teresa, promptly; "at once we will go before he comes back from the corral. His brother's wife—eh? I ask myself if those people—the Americanos—are so much better than our own men, Rafael. I want no scandal and will help you with none; but if you take from him the woman he wants, I will make you a present—a fine one."

"It is a bargain!" he agreed. "I promise to earn the gift. He is a good enough fellow, but much too conceited; we will cure him!"

As Alvara came out on the veranda to tell them Dolores and Madalena were away, and to ask Teresa to call on the stranger in their stead, Teresa and Rafael were on the street.

"It is a good thing to do," he thought, contentedly rolling a cigarro and looking after them. "It is a kindness to Don Eduardo's cousin, and it is good for Teresa. For the first time since the death of Miguel she is smiling. Yes, it is a good thing."

When Bryton left the corrals, the evening had come; the afterglow was flooding the hills with pale rose, and Indian boys were driving home cows through the village street. The more time he had to consider the matter, the more impatient he grew at the reckless disregard of his new sister-in-law for the conventionalities.

Since she had married Teddy, she might at least have remained decently and quietly where he had left her. Or she might have continued her journey and joined her cousin at San Diego; but to do so mad a thing as to stop off here—he determined she should go either north or south to-morrow, if he had to carry her to the stage. He would tell her so at once.

He had arrived at that determination as he crossed the plaza and heard her laugh through the door of Alvara's house. The door was open; she was trying to teach Alvara English, at which his daughters laughed very much. It was the sharp eyes of Teresa that caught sight of Bryton first, as he involuntarily halted in the road.

"Yes, Señor Bryton, it is all true; we have robbed the Señor Mac's hotel of your sister!" she called to him with a new air of elation,—of victory.

Alvara appeared and invited him to supper, which he declined for a previous engagement with Don Antonio. His sister-in-law came out and listened to his excuses, and smiled quietly at him with the baby-blue eyes, in which he read a certain defiance.

"I would have smothered in that awful cell you took me to!" she pouted. "These people are charming to me; they are friends of Cousin Edward's. It was Don Rafael took them to me. He looks like a hero in a picture-book! How does it come I never met him before?"

"Perhaps because during your last visit down here he was in Mexico, making love to the girl he is to marry very soon."

"Oh! is *that* why you are guarding him so carefully?" she said, laughingly. "Well, since I am married, I am willing to stay and dance at his wedding; but, Keith, if I had seen him first—"

She broke off, laughing at the quick anger in his eyes.

And Teresa, listening, understood the game of Rafael and the mocking laughter, and the anger of Bryton, and was as happy as she was likely to be, with Miguel under the ground.

Danza Mexicana.

CHAPTER III

MANY things had happened, and it had been a bad day. "A day cursed of God!" said Pedro Gallardo, the driver; and against such ill fortune the carrriage of Señora Luisa Arteaga made such progress as might be, from San Luis Rey to San Juan.

Clouds had drifted along the mountains each night for a week, and never the ranges a bit the better for it, until the cavalcade of Doña Luisa had started north from San Diego; and then—well, it was not what you would call a rain, it was a torrent came down. The skies had opened, and a deluge followed.

Then, after leaving San Luis Rey, a carriage-pole must break in an attempt at a runaway, and two horses were lost over that, to say nothing of the off leader, whose "sire had been the devil, and whose dam had been a witch thrice accursed in the foaling!"

Their joint offspring had demonstrated his infernal lineage by breaking his own leg as well as the carriage-pole, and another untamed beast had to be roped on the range—hog-tied, and blindfolded to get the harness on him; and because of him Pedro's throat was fairly blistered with curses.

As the wheels sank into the sands or plunged from one ravine into another, Doña Luisa prayed and trusted to the saints that she might see her own valley again, and her companion, Doña Jacoba, protested, and forgetting to pray, waxed argumentative.

"Raquel was right, Luisa," she repeated for the twentieth time between her groans; "we had been wise to wait at San Diego for Rafael. She has an old head on her shoulders—you will have a wise daughter when the day comes."

"Wise! Yes—yes!" moaned Doña Luisa, shaking her head. "I thank the Virgin for that, every day, for Rafael is young, Jacoba; a baby of a wife would be his ruin. Yet—a baby might love him!"

"Our boys get love enough!" grunted Jacoba, thinking of her own sons, and her own troubles. "They need wives with sense; and our girls all go wild these days about the Americanos, so—"

"The girls, too!" and Doña Luisa's tones were strident with censure. "It is bad enough when men

RAQUEL ESTEVAN

must buy and sell with the Americanos in the markets; but the girls,—the women of California,—it is in their hands to shut the door when the Americano knocks—is it not so?"

"Oh, yes, of course—yes—it is as you say," agreed Jacoba, weakly, as she thought of the many girls of their relationship, who had opened doors very wide indeed for the Americanos, and of not a few who were to open also the door of the Church. But who could tell Doña Luisa that?

"Rafael is all I have left, now that Miguel is killed," continued the mother. "My only grandchildren are half-breeds, and only Rafael is left. Ai! it is hard to grow old,—to let go all lines. But you know what makes me happy, Jacoba? No? It is this one big thing. Raquel will be what I was. She may suffer, but she will stand square on her feet; and she will fight as her father fought—and it will be for California."

"You think so?" asked Jacoba, doubtfully. "It may be so, but—do you expect strong fights from a girl who was half a nun? I say she knows too little of the world to fight it."

"You take from me my one hope when you say that!" and the older woman put out her hand appealingly. "Our men are wild—always! It is the women's work to save them. The death of Miguel

is making me think much and quick. Rafael must be marry. There must be no more Indio women and children."

Jacoba glanced doubtfully at her friend. These five years, while Rafael had been learning California ranch life, Jacoba had lived near enough to hear much that she never could repeat to the old mother, whose life was so nearly spent, whose weakness and prejudices could never cope with the new life in the changed land—and of what use to torture her with the truth? She wished with all her heart the exile had elected to stop over at San Diego or San Luis Rey, until some little glimmer of present conditions should enlighten her.

"It is well the *donas* came by water," she remarked, eager to find some straw of comfort in the situation. "Even extra baggage would be a care, with these roads and troubles, to say nothing of the temptation to El Capitan! Thanks to God, he never yet has had record of troubling women on the road."

"He was a fine boy," said Doña Luisa, musingly. "It is not his fault that he is an outlaw to these States. It means only that he is patriot to California. He was a fine boy."

"Ask thy son how fine he thinks El Capitan!" remarked Jacoba. "Rafael has paid him a heavy tax

in his best stock. They have long ago forgotten they are cousins."

"Raquel will make him remember," said the older woman, with certainty. "Did he not fight as he was able beside her father? Ai! he fought for California when only a boy. Do Californians forget?"

"He does not let them do so," remarked Jacoba dryly. "Much has changed, Luisa."

"I see no change, only the Indios more poor. The hills are green, as always after the rains. All these ranges are the same like we rode over them forty years ago. The hills and the sea never change, only the people. It is good to hear there is one of the young left who thinks in the old way."

"But — holy Maria! — we were never robbers, Luisa!"

"Well, we did not need to be," returned her friend. "But I tell you truly, Jacoba, I could find it in my heart to forgive a son who fought the Americanos as he does, even if they made him outlaw. He could not be outlaw to the Church, nor to me."

Jacoba said no more. Of what use was it to tell her that a few such women would be firebrands in the land if they had youth, and that the American soldiers, instead of coming peacefully to buy stock and pay good prices, would come from Los Angeles shooting,

—would come with torches to burn each town where rebels hid. It was no longer little internal wars, such as they used to have in the days they both remembered, when the men who smoked or played together one month would fight under different leaders the next.

There were no faction fights now. It was one great ugly pale nation to the east, trailing slowly over the ranges and planting itself like the live-oak in the cañons. The Mexicans might hate, might curse; but the curses made no difference against the heretics. They had no churches, and they laughed at the beautiful wooden saints in the old chapel. Had not some of them snuffed out candles on the graves with their accursed rifles, last All Saints' Day? Yet the sky had not fallen, and no earthquake had come! What would even prayers or holy Church do against a people so ignored by God?

But Jacoba knew there was no use to fight. She remembered what that meant in the other days. In an old adobe of San Juan's one street she had helped as a girl to nurse the wounded of San Pascual. It was years ago, but she had not forgotten the cruel wounds, or the young Americano who died in her arms there. She had never mentioned to any the reason of her hatred for war; for even with revenge in reach, on whom would she seek it?—

on her brother who had killed a stranger forcing their gates?

"You do not forget how the blessed Junípero Serra himself spoke from the altar of San Juan in the old days, Luisa; our grandfather telling us that many times,—how, when the Spanish guard was hard with the Indios, he stood on the altar and say that a new people will come and put the foot on the neck of the Mexican like the Mexican tramp on the Indios. He say it, and cry—cry for the reason that the good God no can make their hearts more soft to the Indios. I think of that when I see the Americanos come. They not put the foot on the neck—but they are here!"

"Father Junípero was old then—very old—like a child, and would make of the Indios babies to be petted," returned Doña Luisa, leniently. "He was a saint—not a man; only the saints could have the patience with those Indios—I remember! One of the old scares of the padre's was that the water would fail us; yet San Juan still has its river!"

Jacoba nodded. They were likely to find the river a difficulty after the rainfall. The ford was not a good one in high water; but the thought of getting across the ford was a trifle compared to the difficulty of impressing Doña Luisa with any idea of the change she would find in the land she had known.

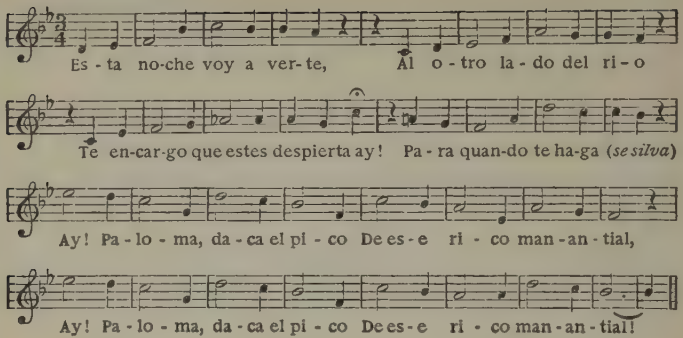
In sheer despair she returned once more to a safer subject, Raquel Estevan,—Raquel the wise, who was to marry with Rafael and forever build a wall about him from American influence; Raquel, who might not love, because of that dark shadow of the cloister, but who would be all the more wise for that! Still, who could tell?

"When one is young like that, one never can be sure until the right man comes," said Jacoba; "and she is handsome, your Raquel. But is it true what they say, that there was the blood of the old Mexican Indios in her mother?"

Doña Luisa did not commit herself; yet she realized that Raquel Estevan might have a few battles to fight along the line of race, as well as against the Americanos; for of course Rafael was a favorite; of course there would be burning hearts and jealousy at first.

KEITH BRYTON

Esta Noche


Es - ta no-che voy a ver- te, Al o - tro la - do del ri - o
Te en-car-go que estes despierta ay! Pa - ra quan-do te ha-ga (*se silva*)
Ay! Pa - lo - ma, da - ca el pi - co De es - e ri - co man - an - tial,
Ay! Pa - lo - ma, da - ca el pi - co De es - e ri - co man - an - tial!

CHAPTER IV

FROM Las Flores, where the Indian village still held together in a shiftless sort of way, Raquel Estevan and her friend Ana Mendez galloped north mile on mile over the mesa above the sea.

"Art never tired, Raquel?" demanded the older and darker of the two as they halted to let their animals drink where a rivulet ran full from the foothills. "Since we left the ranch house thou hast never lessened the gallop."

"Tired? I should shame to acknowledge that, when Doña Luisa never rests on the way. She endures it all, while only the young ones complain."

"Endures! What would she not endure for her beloved Rafael — now your beloved Rafael?"

Ana was not malicious, but there was a touch of mockery in her tone and questioning glance.

"Why should he not be beloved?" asked the other,

smoothing carefully the mane of her horse and bending low to conceal the slight flush of cheek. "Is he not handsome and good?"

"It is not easy to be good when a man is so handsome," laughed Ana; "still, I will take your word for it! But, Raquel, you always get clear of the question; not once have you said that you find him beloved. Are you going to be coquette to the wedding-day?"

"You talk to amuse yourself," and the violet dark eyes were lifted an instant. "You learn to coquette when you marry, and cannot forget; but the nuns never teach us that."

"What need?" and Ana showed her white teeth in a laugh. "They did not teach us we must breathe to live; yet some way we learned it! But confess! You outride all the party to reach San Juan, and Rafael; yet how are we sure what urges you?"

"My promise."

"But why the promise, if the man is not beloved? You have had no harsh guardian, as I had; you were all free."

"Free? Oh yes, I had always the choice between some husband and the veil of a nun. And then — then Doña Luisa came with her love and her son, and her great plans of good work I could do out in

the world. And so—and so we are riding to meet him, and I outride you!"

"I never hasten to trouble," remarked Ana Mendez; "and if we should meet him on the way, you would send me at once to the carriage. I should put in hours listening to the virtues of Rafael Arteaga and peril my soul pretending to agree with his mother."

"Why should you do that?"

"Raquel, do you really see how little the ideas of Don Rafael and his mother agree? I know little enough—thanks to California, which keeps its girls from education; but I do see that every thought of Rafael Arteaga is for the new ways, the ways of the Americano."

The younger girl drew up her horse with a cruel jerk, and faced her friend.

"Anita, beloved," she said, sadly, "you have said the thing I felt, but did not know. Why not let some less dear one tell me?"

"Holy Maria! Who else would? You are going among strangers, but you are no more a stranger to the California of to-day than is Doña Luisa. I hope all the time some one tell you at San Diego, or at San Luis Rey, but no one does; and Rafael does not meet us; and—"

"The letter did not reach him, or else he has gone

by boat," said the other, steadily. "Anita, why do you sometimes seem not quite friendly to Rafael? Your words—"

"Never think it!" cried Ana. "We are friends enough, but—I know him better than his mother—that is all! He has turned the heads of many girls, but I do not think he has turned yours, Raquelita!"

The other girl made no reply.

"I do not think so," continued her friend, "because you have never once lost sight of duty,—the duty Doña Luisa and the padre have taught you to see. You are good, Raquel,—when you are not in a temper; but about Rafael you do not think your own thoughts. You dream of the life of your father and Doña Luisa when all this land was theirs. But the dream is gone, and to-day we wake up."

"I see—the old world was too slow. You wake up to be all Americano—no?"

"Raquel, do you hate them as much as Doña Luisa?"

The girl from Mexico turned her face toward the sea, and did not answer at once. Then she said:

"Only once in my life have I spoken with an Americano, and I did not hate him."

"A young man?"

"He—he was not old," she confessed.

"On my soul, I believe you have had a lover!" cried Ana. "Oho! you can play Rafael at his own game, after all! Santa Maria! I thought you were too pretty to be the saint they think you. Tell me!"

"There is not anything to tell," said the younger girl, quietly, though the color crept to her cheek; and then after a little she added, "He died. I never saw him but once; the padre said I was wrong to—to—oh, they said things to me about heretics! I never knew any other, and I promised not to. But if he had lived I should not have promised; that is all."

"All! Rafael would think it enough! On my soul, I am glad you are so human—though I have no love myself for heretics!"

"Human!" mused Raquel. "Is it human to remember, when one should forget and cannot?"

She did not say it aloud, and refused to discuss the matter further.

"He is dead," she said; "Rafael cannot be jealous of a man I saw but once; it was only the dream of a girl—like a picture in a book—and the page is closed. I shall marry Rafael, and work in the world instead of in the convent. It is for Mother Church and—it is right!"

At San Onofre the surf was breaking against the cliffs. It was high tide, and the beach road was deep

enough for a horse to swim. Raquel had ridden far ahead, and now stood on the brink of a torrent cutting its way down from the hills to the sea.

The girl glanced back at the swaying chariot-like carriage on a far hill, and wondered what would be expected of their broncos in this crisis.

The animal she herself rode danced and fretted with fright at the roar of the surf and the dash of the hill stream, but she sat the saddle with ease, answering to every curve or side leap as lightly as a gull that floated on the incoming wave.

Her face held something of the power suggested by her strong right hand. The eyes were so soft, yet steady, and of darkest violet. The black lashes touching her cheeks gave them tender shadows, and the hair, in two thick braids reaching to her waist, framed a face of youthful curves and charm. But what was it made every man, and many women, turn to look again at the face of Raquel Estevan?

Many girls were as beautiful, but something beyond the beauty of feature or color was in her strange half-Egyptian face,—a certain barbaric note held in check by the steady eyes and the mouth firm yet tender. It was a mouth made for love; yet—was it the shadow of the dark veil she had so nearly worn? Was it a hint of regret for the cloistered life left behind? Or

was it the shadow of some future—a prophecy of the years to come?

Ana paused at the edge of the stream, in terror at the volume of water barring their way on every side.

"Ai! ai! And Aunt Jacoba but a moment ago declaring that she will have her supper in the refectory of the San Juan Mission. Neither Mission nor supper can we see this night—and no Rafael!"

She turned dismayed though roguish eyes on Raquel.

"He did not expect us when the rains came," said Raquel with quiet certainty. "If he received Doña Luisa's letter, he has gone by sea to San Diego. Did she not say so, Anita?"

"Oh, he can do much, your handsome Rafael," agreed Ana, "but he cannot yet stop the tide, or dam La Christienita! Such a dry bed in Summer! and now it is a river."

"But not deep?" hazarded Raquel. "Not so deep as the carriage bed."

"Deep? There is one ford that is safe if one knows it; but, Holy Maria! on each side are pits of a depth to drown us all!"

"Oh, if there is a good ford to be found—" The rest of Raquel's sentence was drowned in Ana's shrieks of protest, as her horse was spurred into the torrent in search of the roadway safe for a carriage.

Ana was right; there were pits, and there were great round bowlders on the edges of them. The horse stumbled on one, recovered, and stumbled again where the current swung into a whirlpool; and then, as the water roaring in her ears almost drowned Ana's screams, a sharp authoritative voice sounded from the bank—

"Loose the stirrup!"

Raquel did so mechanically, just as a rope circled about her shoulders, pinning her arms to her sides, and with a quick, cruel jerk she was wrenched from the saddle; and as her horse, relieved of her weight, swam straight for the opposite shore, she felt herself caught by a strong arm and lifted across another saddle. The man with the reata had caught her first, lest she be dragged downward into the whirlpool, but it was another man who dashed through the whirl of waters and bore her to the shore, where half a dozen men waited. They were evidently vaqueros; one of them had thrown the reata, and hastened now to loosen it, to lift her from her rescuer and stand her on her feet. She swayed a trifle, and reaching blindly for support, she caught the arm of a man beside her, the one who had lifted her from the water. Then for the first time she noticed that he wore the garb of a priest, evidently a secular priest, for he wore a beard,

and even then it struck her as strange that he looked so bronzed and rugged. His grasp was that of a rider of the range, rather than a priest of the Church.

"Father, the Virgin have you in her keeping! You saved my life then. I shall always — always — "

Then she could no longer distinguish priest from vaquero; the earth seemed to meet the sky, and between them she was extinguished.

When she awoke she no longer could hear the screams of Ana, and the red rays of the lowering sun touched the face of the priest as he bent over her. It had more of youth than she had at first perceived.

"Lie you still," he said, as one used to command. "The water was rough with you, and the reata rougher. Swallow some of this wine; it came from your own carriage, and is better than ours."

"From the carriage?" The carriage was on the opposite side of the stream, but her horse had followed her and was tied near, shaking himself like a great dog.

"Yes. I sent one of the boys — the vaqueros — across. Your friends know you are safe, but the carriage cannot come over — not yet; you have had good fortune to get out."

"The good fortune was to find you here, father," she said, and catching his hand she kissed it reverently.

"It is a good omen and shows me a blessing is on my journey to my father's land. You may have known him by name. I am Raquel Estevan, and it was my father Felipe who once owned this land from mountain to sea."

"Felipe Estevan — you! But that cannot be. He is dead, and his one child is in religion — I was told so — I —"

The color came back to her face, and she raised herself on her elbow.

"It is true — I was for the Church — but I will tell you all — some time!"

"Go on," said the priest, authoritatively, "tell me now!"

"I was told it was better to work for God out in the world," she said, softly, "and so I am coming with my Aunt Luisa, father's cousin, and —"

"And —" he looked at her strangely. "Then it is you — you they bring to marry with Rafael Arteaga. Holy Mary! And it is Felipe's daughter — Felipe Estevan — who sold for a song rather than live under the Americanos; and it is for his daughter I wait here by San Onofre — for his daughter!"

Raquel stared at his evident agitation, not understanding. The sentences of the padre sank to muttering beneath the black beard, as he turned and strode

away. The vaqueros, standing together holding their horses as if eager to be gone, exchanged wondering glances and eyed the girl curiously. Directly he came striding back and halted beside her.

"Yet you marry with Rafael Arteaga," he said, accusingly. "You are Felipe's daughter, yet you are much Americano — eh? You are of the States, is it not so? Between you two, old California will no longer have foot-room from San Jacinto to the water out there. God!" and he ground his heel into the turf. "Yet are you Felipe's daughter, and we must let you go!"

"No!" she cried as vehemently as he. "I go nowhere from the rules of my father in this land. The things he loved I love; the things he fought for I will guard! It is for that, father, I marry with Rafael. He is — he is not so much for old California, I know — I hear! His mother is afraid; she grieves over that much! But the two of us — the two of us, with your prayers to help, and we keep him always for our father's country — always till he die — with your help!"

"With my — help?"

"Your prayers, father! You will see I am Felipe Estevan's daughter, even while I am born in Mexico. I will do what a son would do for our land and our

Church. You will see — you will see! It is a blessing from God that you meet me here like this at the edge of the land. Always I have thought these thoughts in my heart, but only to you — a priest — could I say them in words, and it is well you meet me here like this. Your words are the words I needed to make me see what I want to do. It is like a baptism that I went under that water a girl, and your hand lift me out a woman! The Virgin sent me here this day that I meet you. You have opened the gate of the land for Felipe Estevan's daughter."

He leaned against the trunk of a young live-oak and stared at her with a derisive smile in the smoke-black eyes.

"Yes, the Virgin sent me," he said at last, "and she came near sending me too late. The trail is bad along La Christienita for the night-time, and the night is close. The man will take you back to your friends."

"But you, father? You come to the carriage and see the mother of Rafael — no? They wait for us. Doña Luisa is so very old; she will be anxious till she speak with me — and with you."

She arose and held out her hand. He regarded her strangely, and shook his head.

"The men have other work than to camp with a

pleasure party. I stay on this side and have far to travel before sunrise. This once I talk with you — maybe nevermore, and to San Juan you take one message for Rafael Arteaga."

"A message? Yes?"

"Tell him Felipe Estevan's daughter has saved to him this once a treasure; but no woman can guard him always, for — El Capitan is never too far to come quickly!"

"Oh — Capitan?" she said with sudden comprehension. "I was told at San Luis Rey how much he is the enemy of Rafael. But it must not be, father. Cannot we help that? I have heard of Capitan from an old soldier of the wars, who told me all I know of my father: he was a brave boy and — he fought beside my father. I remembered that when I passed his mother's grave at San Luis Rey — it will never be bare and forgotten again — never! I planted it thick with the passion-vine. Doña Luisa tells me she was a great woman. She prays that some day the two cousins may be friends."

"Doña Luisa prays for what only the good God could make happen," said the priest, grimly. "But of course all things are possible to the good God, even in the land which God forgot. Fidele is waiting."

He made a movement toward the Mexican holding

her horse, and without further words mounted another animal himself, and galloped away along the fringe of trees skirting the cañon. Several of the others followed. Only three remained to watch Fidele pilot his charge across the ford, where the ford was safe though deep; and once her animal's feet touched the opposite bank, her attendant, with a sweep of sombrero, but no words, wheeled his own horse and fell in line after his comrades, who were disappearing one by one toward the mountains.

Raquel Estevan sat her horse at the edge of the stream and stared after them, giving little heed to the shrill calls and exclamations of the women. Even after they had stripped her of the soaked riding-dress and wrapped her in serapes for the night, she maintained a thoughtful silence, and all Ana's hints of romances went for nought, so far as gaining replies or special notice.

What treasure had Felipe Estevan's daughter saved for Rafael Arteaga? And why — why — that strange intensity of the priest? These questions were turned again and again in her mind as she lay there in the light of the camp-fire watching the stars move across the high blue. The other three women were sleeping as best they could in the carriage, smothered in serapes. Jacoba lamented every waking moment,

because of much-feared rheumatism,—she was so certain it would mean a camp at the hot springs for a month, just at the time of the wedding!

Doña Luisa made no complaint. When told the carriage could not by any means cross safely, she braced herself for the ordeal of the night, and Raquel, glancing toward her, could see her face gray-white in the gathering dusk. All the night that gray profile met her eyes, for she slept not at all.

The driver had stretched himself where his horses were tethered, but the two Indian boys who rode with the carriage kept a fire of aliso boughs burning. They would nod at times with sleepiness, but the whispered command of the girl ever wakened them quickly, and the dying fire would blaze again. There was no conversation, only brief commands and prompt obedience; and thus the girl passed the first night in the land of her father, the roar of the sea and the wild calls of the coyotes keeping silence from the night.

When the coyotes ceased and the birds heralded dawn, one Indian boy rode across at the ford and gauged the depth of the water on his cow-pony's legs. It was "muy bueno"—very good indeed, the water had gone down a foot, and before the dawn broke, the whole cavalcade was again under way. There was

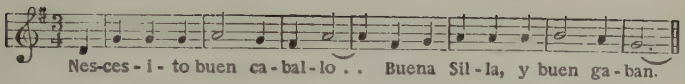
breakfast to ride for, and it was several miles across the hills.

Pedro was of the opinion that there was a round-up in the cañon of La Paz, about half-way to San Juan. If so, there might be "carne oeco" and coffee to be had — perhaps tortillas. The vaqueros would be eating by dawn, but if it was possible to drive fast, there might be hope of coffee at least.

So Raquel rode ahead, alert at the coming day and the promise of it. Ana was glad to stay in the carriage with the older women, complaining that she had caught cold from the sea-damp. At one bend of the road she noticed Raquel far ahead, bending low over the neck of her horse, scanning the ground. Then she turned out of sight under the live-oaks in a narrow cañon, and came galloping back to the main trail as the carriage came up.

"One would think you were searching the sand for grains of gold washed down from the mountains!" called Ana; but the girl shook her head, and rode thoughtfully up the incline to the mesa above. She had been noting the curious fact that the party of vaqueros and the priest had left the trail one by one, heading toward the hills wrapped still in the mist of the morning.

El Charro.



CHAPTER V

AT La Paz they were in time for coffee, and Raquel, who had ridden ahead with an Indian boy, was told a strange story by the Mexican cook.

A good breakfast had been cooked, but the devil had got among the horses in the night; there had been a stampede—or something. Every one had got into the saddle and ridden that way—up the river,—no one had come back to tell him what it meant or to eat the breakfast that was ready. It was cold now, all but the coffee, but they were welcome to it.

He was a newcomer in the land, and had never heard of the Doña Luisa. To the cholo the lady or the lord of the land is often an unknown personality; their representative, the major-domo, is the centre of their little universe.

But as the carriage came lurching down from the mesa, the oldest of the vaqueros, a very black Indian, rode back to camp, and at sight of Doña Luisa's face white and drawn in the morning light, he slid from his bronco, and ignoring the cook's impatient questions stood with bent head uncovered, until the old mistress noticed him and spoke.

"You are Benito, are you not?" she asked, as she brought him to the carriage with a gesture, and rested her hand on his to alight.

"Yes, señora," said the old man with grave courtesy, though trembling with pleasure at the honor she chose to bestow; "I am Benito. I used to break all the horses you rode. No one else was let put a hand on them. You do not forget; I thank you."

"I could not forget the things of my home. Is there coffee? I am very glad."

She held her left hand against her side, and the women exchanged frightened glances at her pallor and the strange weakness of her voice. While she drank the hot coffee Jacoba deftly drew the old vaquero aside to look at a bit of broken carriage harness which Pedro was mending with rawhide.

"Benito, is there no boy here to ride fast to the Mission?" she demanded when out of hearing of the others. "Our Doña Luisa is a sick woman, and no

one dare say it. Some one must go and have a bed ready—everything!"

"There is no boy here. The horses were run off last night by Juan Flores or Capitan—no one knows how many. All the men have gone that way. I ride to the Mission. Don Rafael, he go to San Diego to-day."

"To-day? Santa Maria! he may have gone! Ride fast!"

"He not go yet," and the old man shrugged his shoulders. "Too early. Army men going away. Don Rafael make barbecue yesterday, and last night he have a big dance for the Americanos in the Mission."

"Hush! Ride fast! We will drive as slow as she will let us. But tell Don Rafael Arteaga I say for him to meet his mother on the road."

Raquel noticed the old man cantering slowly along the level green, and heard the sound of his horse galloping rapidly once he was out of sight past the fringe of sycamores and low growths along the river.

"For what is that, Jacoba?" she asked.

"Oh, some bandits have run off some horses—they may send more vaqueros," she replied as easily as she could with the girl watching her like that.

Raquel looked as though she thought all the truth

might not be in the reply, but she turned quietly away.

"I would have ridden with him if I had known," she said, and went back to Doña Luisa, who was so eager to continue the journey that she would wait for no breakfast but the coffee.

"Cut another strap of the harness and take time to mend it," muttered Jacoba to Pedro; "we are not all so near to being angels that we can live without eating."

Thus was a little more time gained.

Benito made the second crossing where the river bends around the mesa, and there met one of the boys from the village looking for a pair of strayed mules.

"The Don Rafael—he has started for San Diego?" demanded Benito. "Turn and ride with me, José."

The boy did so, grinning.

"When Don Rafael wake up to-day he much too late to go to San Diego," he said, and the old man uttered a sigh of relief.

"He sleeping, then?"

"No one sleep in San Juan last night," said José. "There was the supper, and some girls stay. The army men they all start north an hour ago, but maybe the others still dance in the Mission. Don Rafael say he go to get married, this is his last night —no one must sleep, or be sober!"

José thought it a great joke, but Benito muttered, "Jesus and San Vicente!" and ordered the boy to go back for the mules, and rode on down the valley alone.

It took José some time to find the mules, and when he did find them they were even more perverse than usual; he had got them so near home as the hill above San Juan, when one of them went careering along the mesa as though heading for San Jacinto mountain.

By the time he had secured it and got back near the road an astonishing sight met his eyes — something one was not used to seeing at sunrise in San Juan.

A carriage came down the valley road from La Paz cañon. There were only women in it, and two Indian boys rode in the rear. Where could a carriage like that come from at such an hour? No one who rode in carriages lived up those valleys!

In staring at the carriage he failed at first to notice the girl on horseback, who had ridden alone in advance of the carriage, and had halted in the road, on the brow of the hill, looking down across the old pueblo to the sea.

She was so motionless, he was very close before he noticed her, close enough to hear her indrawn breath of delight, to see the soft flush of emotion

touch her face. Almost he thought there were tears in her eyes; he thought her the most beautiful lady he had ever seen alive, — though one picture of the Virgin in the chapel was as fine.

José stopped at the sight of her and stood very still. He could not drive mules into the road ahead of a lady who was more lovely than even the wooden saints with the gold painted around the border of their gowns; and that is how he chanced to see a strange meeting on that hill.

No one knew why the English señora had elected to take a pleasure ride alone that morning, when the message of Benito, shouted as he galloped past, had effectually banished from the minds of Dolores and Madalena their intended picnic at the hot springs in the mountain, for which they were all ready, and had actually started. But when they tumbled with delighted exclamations from the new American buggy, and straightway forgot all their plans for the day, including the entertainment of their English guest, she stared in ill-concealed irritation from one to the other as they chattered in Spanish, scarcely enlightening her as to the reason of the sudden change in their plans.

When she finally gathered the idea that it was the unexpected proximity of Rafael's bride-to-be, and that

all the other social lights of the valley must expect to be extinguished in her honor, the red lips of the Englishwoman straightened a trifle, and the baby-blue eyes took on a shade of coldness; for since her arrival in California she had been made the centre of many social affairs. In San Juan her one week, managed by Teresa and Rafael, had been enough of a triumph to cause Keith Bryton inward rage and to hold him there as long as an excuse to stay had offered.

Once she said in a burst of irritated frankness:

"For mercy's sake, let me be happy once! You are a dog in the manger, that's all! These people really live! There is an empire here for the right woman, and you need not tug at my chains to remind me that I was fool enough to marry before I found it!"

And now the real ruler of the empire was about to enter into possession, and the temporary one was frankly forgotten! Whatever her thoughts were, she did not mean to assist at the royal entry of those two women whose rule meant the ignoring of the English-speaking people.

Only Teresa, watching her out of beady black eyes, comprehended and was content. Rafael had earned the gift she had promised, but it had gone quite far enough; it was as well Doña Luisa was coming with the other girl!

So, when Bryton's sister-in-law looked rather blank and did not descend from the carriage, it was Teresa who agreed that it *was* a morning too beautiful to stay indoors, and of course if Doña Angela cared to drive alone — and would excuse them —

Doña Angela would. She leaned back languidly, a picture of carelessness, and motioned the driver to go on, but her lips still held their straight hard line as they passed the great dome of the ruined chancel, where the birds held sovereign sway.

"It looks like a place for a throne," she thought, enviously; "and a black creature from Mexico is coming to rule it!"

They were crossing the bridge at the streamlet, when an exclamation from the driver caused her to glance ahead and see the erect slender figure on the dark horse silhouetted against the yellow flood of sunrise.

No girl of San Juan rode alone like that on the mesa, and certainly not one would have paused like that, transfixed by the beauty before her; there was not one that would not rather have admired the beautiful new buggy and the pretty hat of the fair lady in it.

But the girl on the horse did not appear to notice either any more than she had noticed José. Her

horse had halted straight across the middle of the road. The driver of the buggy had turned aside before she brought her gaze back from the sea cliffs to rest for an instant on the fair indignant face of the Englishwoman.

The road was miles wide really—since one could drive anywhere on the mesa, but the Mrs. Teddy Bryton had heretofore seen every native step aside from the beaten trail when she drove abroad, and she was furious at the driver for turning his horses an iota out of his way for that girl who looked like—what did she look like?

Mrs. Bryton could not have put into words the idea of the girl's face; but her own angry blue eyes were caught and held for an instant by strange fathomless violet ones—held until she shrank suddenly, and the color left her face. Yet—as the carriage paused, her head was still turned toward the stranger, and José saw her put her hands suddenly across her eyes with a gesture of repulsion or pain, and sink back on the cushions.

The girl on the horse had not moved a muscle. She might have been carved from marble, for any sign she made after she read the angry insolence of the blue eyes.

"Don Felipe Estevan's daughter," said the Mexican

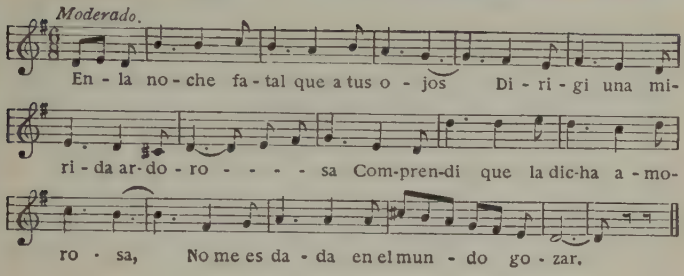
driver, "and here ahead of the carriage of the Señora Luisa—it must be so."

Mrs. Bryton gave no sign that she heard, neither did she glance at the occupants of the carriage as they whirled past; her mind held only one hateful picture.

"Felipe Estevan's daughter" meant that she had looked into the eyes of the "black woman from Mexico" who had come back to her father's land to rule, and the Mexican woman had proven not so black as she had fancied, and had sat there on the crest of the hill with a pride that was half regal,—and almost half barbaric,—as though the highway was her very own—as though the centre of it belonged to her by divine right. Mrs. Bryton's vain soul was fired by a momentary wild temptation to test that divine right, to show her there was one man in San Juan not to be ruled by anyone else if she, Angela Bryton, cared to call him to her side and keep him there. Should she—or should she not?

Teresa was quite right in her fancy that the trick against the Americano had been quite successful enough; it was time the other girl came to claim her own!

La Noche Fatal.


Moderado.
En - la no - che fa - tal que a tus o - jos Di - ri - gi una mi-
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ro - sa, No me es da - da en el mun - do go - zar.

CHAPTER VI

IT was quite true that no one was allowed to sleep that night of Rafael's last bachelor supper. Because of Miguel's death, there could be no dancing, but the hours passed merrily enough, for all that. The army men stayed until the faint gray shone in the east, when they mounted and rode north after the horses, started a day ahead.

Keith Bryton had ridden with the herd as far as Santa Ana, and then, to Angela's amusement, returned to San Juan. She was certain that his return had not been for Rafael's supper, but to see that she

did not by some manœuvre manage that it be a ladies' supper and graced by her attendance. She had in jest threatened to suggest it, and Keith felt very much as Teresa felt—it was quite time the bride were at hand to stop a flirtation bordering on the dangerous.

But, after all, the ladies of San Juan were not included. It was a carouse instead of an entertainment. Girls were there, and guitars; and the big Mission doors and wooden shutters inside the deep windows barred the outer world from the hilarity, the songs, the shrieks of laughter over toasts of the old men to the groom-elect.

At earliest dawn the army men, with promises and gold pieces to the girls, and an extra glass to Rafael and his bride, mounted their horses and rode north to catch up with the herd before it reached Los Angeles. One of the girls wept lest the one who had made her favorite might never ride that way again, and the wilder spirits marched around her with lighted candles, singing a funeral dirge, ending in a wild fandango.

Don Antonio was there, and old Ricardo Ruiz, and they sat through the night playing with the dice, and emptying each other's pockets in turn, and comparing the old entertainment with the new, between the drinks.

The fandango ended by Concha, the weeping one,

doing the maddest dancing of all, and Fernando Mendez poured out goblets of wine to drink luck to her next lover.

"It is good luck for himself he wants, Concha!" called Rafael across the room. "Fernando is a coyote, always awake for young chickens!"

"Concha mia, he is jealous; never heed him, but drink wine with me to the next lover!"

"He offers her a glass of wine, Antonio," grunted old Don Ricardo. "Huh!—that is the love-making of California to-day!"

"True, Ricardo; at his age you or I would have been at her feet and our jewels on her breast."

"Fernando has no jewels left."

"I should say not. His father made love after our fashion, hence—"

"The deluge!"

"The deluge of poverty and Americanos," assented Antonio. "A plague on them both! They have changed the land!"

A burst of laughter from Rafael's end of the table drowned the grumblings of the old men. Rafael had told a story so very funny that the girls had shrieked and giggled and protested behind their fans.

"Fie, Don Rafael! and you to be a married man in a week!"

"But a week is seven nights away, and all of them your own, Merced mia!"

"Merced!" called another man from a game of *malia* at an old table once used for altar service—"Merced, darling, never listen to a word he says! A paltry seven nights! My heart is at your feet for a lifetime!"

"Of nights or days, señor?" asked the girl, laughingly.

"She caught you there, Señor Gonzales," observed Bryton, who was dealing the cards. "Don Rafael, after all, makes the only definite offer."

"You are right, Don Keith," returned the other. "With the help of the Americanos, Don Rafael is learning to be a good maker of bargains."

"The sooner the rest of you learn the same trick, the better for California!" retorted Rafael.

"You hear?" said Don Ricardo.

"Sure," assented the major-domo. "What if his mother heard?"

"All the saints! There would be murder!"

"Por Dios!" exclaimed Rafael, as a servant opened a window because of the thick tobacco smoke; "it is daylight, and I must start for San Diego. My last bachelor carouse is ended, and none of us under the table!"

"How sad that we are still able to stand on our

own feet!" laughed Merced. "See!" and she sprang to the top of a beautiful silver-decorated chest against the wall; "one of us is even able to dance good-bye to your last night of freedom! Good-bye, O free heart of Don Rafael! On some to-morrow the bride comes!"

"Holy Maria!" ejaculated Don Antonio, putting his glass down; "she is dancing on the *donas* of the bride!"

"The *donas!*" echoed Don Ricardo, aghast; "and the bride a young saint stolen from the Church!—the *donas!*"

"What's that?" asked Bryton, while the rest applauded the dancer. "*Donas?*"

"The gifts of the groom to the bride,—the gown, the wedding veil, the—holy God! it's sacrilege!"

"Is it?" asked the American; "then we'll stop it. Come to coffee, Merced!"

Without further ceremony he picked the girl up in his arms, and carried her, laughing and struggling, into the great refectory, where the Indian servants were placing breakfast on the table.

"That was quick work, Antonio," observed Don Ricardo, with a breath of relief.

"Sure; he is the best of all the Americanos. Ai! even more like the caballeros of other days than our own sons!"

Don Ricardo did not care to commit himself so far as that. He contented himself with grumbling at Rafael's indifference.

"And the girl a young saint—meant to live in religion!"

Bryton rejoined them with a cup of coffee, and both the men hastened to assure him that it was not Rafael who was in fault, but the many glasses he had emptied.

"Sure, it was the glasses," affirmed Don Ricardo. "No man of California would let a girl of pleasure dance on the things sacred to the woman of his family; eh, Antonio?"

"Of course; at any other time Rafael would have thrown the girl through a window; truly, he would!"

"No doubt of it," agreed Bryton.

"Doña Luisa has given the boy a long rope. It must be that she has learned that it is too long—she comes back after the years to steady him with a wife,—and such a wife! Young, wealthy, beautiful!"

"And a young nun, all but the veil!"

"That seems rather a joke—or a tragedy—after all this," and Bryton motioned to the remainders of the night's carouse.

"If there is a joke, it is the devil playing it on the saints."

"Sure; and the devil wins," agreed Don Antonio. "It is all settled. The Doña Luisa is a wise woman. Her son wins a wife, and the convent loses a fortune and a nun at the same time."

"Had the good son nothing to do with the arrangement?" asked the American, dryly.

"Oh, of course, señor. Three times he have gone to Mexico, where Felipe Estevan's daughter visit with his mother. He has time to sing many dozens of serenades,—all of the burning hearts and torment of love, and lost souls, to make a girl have pity. Maybe she have never before talked with one young man, one minute of her life; who knows?"

"It is good time she comes," observed Don Ricardo. "One year—two years, and Rafael, like Miguel, would be content with half-breed children and their mother. Little Marta's child is born, and they say she will not stay at Las Flores, where he sent her—not for the best house there!"

A peal of laughter reached them from the other room.

"Bravo!" called Rafael; "I take you at your word, Merced. A kiss to seal the compact!"

"Keep it for your wedding-day, Don Rafael," she retorted, and ran from him through the door into the room where the three men were talking. But Rafael caught her inside the portal, and dragged her back,

his face flushed and his beautiful eyes glowing.

"I will have it!" he muttered, with his lips against her own. "You pretty devil, I will!"

"And this is the home your young nun will come to from her convent," Bryton remarked. "Some one said there was Indian blood in her family; it may prove fortunate, for she will need war-clubs instead of religion to quell this sort of thing."

"But with the help of her saints—"

"Of course," agreed Bryton; "with the help of her saints all things may happen."

An Indian servant came in from the plaza, and closed the door and stood with his back against it.

"The Doña Madalena, and Doña Dolores, and the Señora Bryton, stop in the calesha," he announced, stoically; "they come in!"

"Bar that door! they sha'n't; they must not!" called Bryton, but it was too late. The side door opened, and the three appeared—the two girls plainly frightened, but Mrs. Bryton beautifully audacious.

"Nonsense! Doña Teresa will not scold; we will stop only a minute. Your uncle and cousin are here—it is all right!" Then she saw Bryton, and laughed.

"I told you I would at least see inside," she observed, "and it is quite worth while. What a magnificent chest!"

Bryton walked directly to her.

"I will see you to your carriage," he said, laying his hand on her arm. "What the devil did you mean by this bravado?"

She wrenched her arm free and regarded him coolly.

"Thanks. I came because I said I would come, and you said not to dare. 'Dare' is a risky word, amigo. We will go directly. We are going to the hills, and only halted to wish good luck to Rafael."

"Malediction!" muttered Don Antonio. "He can't be seen—he—"

A burst of laughter came from the dining-room, and the two girls retreated toward the door.

"Women!" breathed Dolores; "if Doña Teresa hears this—"

"It is the servants—only the servants," said Don Antonio. "Don Rafael has perhaps started on his journey; he will be disconsolate that—"

But at that moment Rafael and Fernando came in from the dining-room, one smoothing his hair and one arranging his cravat. Rafael was the less sober of the two, but he managed to bow with a certain grace as he took Mrs. Bryton's hand.

"My poor house is at your service, madama," he murmured, "and I am at your feet. I hastened to you as soon as—"

—"As soon as he could get the other girls out the back door," remarked Fernando, aside to Bryton.

"Mr. Bryton was horribly cross to me for coming in; he thinks it too unconventional; he thinks I do not know the Spanish customs, and—"

"I offer myself as your teacher," said Rafael, looking straight into the blue eyes. "Believe me, señora, there are many delightful things to be learned in old California!"

"I shall remember your offer," she returned, smilingly. "See how sulky Mr. Bryton looks! He never takes time to be gallant himself."

"That is true," assented Rafael. "He never looks at the girls, or speaks except to tell them to keep quiet."

"Oh!" she replied, with a little malicious smile, "there is always a girl excepted!"

Bryton looked at her with impatient wonder; he was about to speak, when an Indian came in with a tray of coffee, and Rafael offered a cup to Mrs. Bryton.

"Honor me, madama, and let us hear of the girl who is an exception."

"Bravo! The exceptions are always of interest. Don Keith is forever a reproach to the rest of us; he has no vices."

"Or conceals them better!" put in Rafael, with a touch of malice.

"You are to be unmasked, señor," murmured Dolores, with lenient eyes.

Bryton glanced at his watch and then with impatience at his sister-in-law.

"I have not the slightest idea of the lady's meaning," he said, coldly; "and if you want to make an early start for the hot springs—"

Mrs. Bryton shut her teeth together with a little click, at his palpable ignoring of herself.

"Oh—short memory of man!" she said, chidingly; "He has forgotten in a year!"

"A year?" Bryton stared at her with a puzzled frown, and a slight motion of his hand toward the door. That, with its little suggestion of authority, decided her.

"I shall tell it," she announced. "How many of you believe in love at first sight?"

"All of us, after meeting you!" declared Rafael, with an exaggerated bow.

"Sure!" agreed Don Ricardo.

"My husband, you know, is an engineer, and goes on long journeys into queer corners of the mining world."

"Bad habit for husbands with pretty wives," remarked Don Antonio.

"Last Winter," continued she, slowly sipping her coffee and watching Bryton; "last Winter he went to Mexico."

"Pardon! We do not ask for the love affairs of your lucky husband, but—"

"But last Winter Don Keith went along; yes—he went along to look up some mining property in the Indian hills, and when he came back— Have any of you noticed the peculiar ring Mr. Bryton wears?"

"Angela!" said Keith, sharply; but she looked at him with smiling insolence.

"Oh, I know your little romance of Doña Espiritu; Teddy told me."

"Damn Teddy!" he remarked, while the rest shouted with laughter at the color flaming in his face.

"Doña Espiritu!" repeated Don Ricardo. "The lady of the Spirit—let us hope it was a good spirit, Don Keith—and that she was kind!"

"To her health!" cried Rafael. "Pour brandy, Fernando; we drink our last toast of this meeting to the love of Don Keith—to the Doña Espiritu!"

"I would rather see the ring than drink the toast," said Dolores. "May I, señor?"

"There is nothing remarkable about it, except that it is very, very old," and he held out his hand for her inspection. "An onyx engraved with the Aztec eagle—now the Mexican eagle."

"But given him by—"

"By a lady who was of service to my brother, to an old priest, and to me."

"See how he drags in the others," laughed Mrs. Bryton. "Teddy and the priest got no ring; Ted had a knife-thrust, and the priest a black eye. Keith had some hurt on the head, from which he had a long and interesting case of fever."

"Let us hope Doña Espiritu nursed him through it, and the priest did not watch them too closely," remarked Rafael, with a meaning glance at Bryton. The last drink of brandy had been the one too many, and his smile was not nice.

"Did she nurse him through the illness?" whispered Madalena in Angela's ear.

"Oh, I could tell," said the latter, demurely; "but Keith evidently resents his romances being made public."

"Señorita, there is no more to tell," remarked Keith, coldly; "not even so much as Angela would suggest. My brother and an old priest and I lost our way in the hills; and seeing a light, we chanced on some religious meeting of a strange hill tribe of Indians. They thought we were spies of the Church or the government, and there was trouble. A lady, whom the Indians and the priest called by the name you heard, saved us all that night. She was the one

person of the Catholic Church they would allow to know them well, and she was a nun or a novice."

"Santa Maria! and she gave you rings?"

"The ring was some talisman respected by the tribe. She put it on my finger after I had been struck down and — well — used up. It stopped them when words were of no use. We made a litter for the old priest, and tied Teddy on a burro,—he had a leg wound,—and we walked beside them over the wilderness trail until dawn came, and we met help. I fainted from loss of blood about that time, and Teddy and I recuperated in the house of the old priest. We never saw the lady again."

"You never saw her again after an adventure like that!" cried Fernando in amaze. "That is cold blood for you!"

"It may be that she was ugly — or old," suggested Rafael.

"On the contrary, she was so charming that he shouted for her in the delirium of the fever; that is how Teddy learned that she was the one exception among girls! But all their scheming could not learn her name from the priest or the Mexicans. 'Doña Espiritu' was all they ever heard. Teddy fancied they had shipped her to Spain for the adventure with a heretic that one night."

"Is it all true, señor?" asked Dolores. "Doña Angela laughs at it, and you frown; and between the two, how are we to know how serious it may all be to you?"

"Serious enough to make him bare his head at every old battered shrine for her sake," said Angela, with a little shrug; "and an old ring of his mother's was lost from his finger on that wilderness trail, while the Mexican eagle took its place. Oh, nuns are only women after all, and much can happen in the length of a Mexican night!"

"Well, señor," said Dolores, with sudden courage, "I am a good Catholic, thank God! and I see no sacrilege in the sort of love for which a man bares his head at a shrine. Señor Bryton, the story will make us of California more than ever your friends!"

"Sure," agreed Don Antonio.

"I am at your feet, señorita," said Bryton, with kindly deference. "Now, Mrs. Bryton, if you have no other — romances — to elaborate and embellish, perhaps you will allow me to see you to your carriage, before I start for Los Angeles. Don Rafael is detained by us when he should be on his way south, and — "

"Oh — I beg — " began Rafael, but Madalena interrupted.

"Not another moment must we stay. Aunt Teresa will scold us well for this!"

"For taking pity on a lonely bachelor?" asked Rafael.

"Lonely?" repeated Dolores "We will come again when the bride comes. Until then we leave you to prepare your soul with this — and this!"

She motioned to the decanter, and picked up the scarlet fan of Mercedes.

"You cruel one! You would make Doña Angela think — but do not think it, madama! I assure you, it is my mother's — or my aunt's — or —"

"He never had an aunt," laughed Madalena. "Come, Uncle Ricardo, Doña Maxima wants you at home; she is at our house saying things to make your ears burn."

"Sure!" said Don Ricardo, getting on his feet and taking the cane offered him. "But it is in honor of Doña Luisa Arteaga I am here. When her son makes gay company, it is the time for the steady friends of the family to stay by. So I am here, Madalena mia; and I shall say to my wife I was here all the evening, right here at this table as a respectable friend, and won seventy pesos!"

"Sure, he did," assented Don Antonio. "But it is over! The sun is up, it is good time to go home."

Rafael managed in the farewells to kiss the hand of Mrs. Bryton twice, and to be observed by Bryton only once. That was enough of victory for the moment, and when the door was closed he flung himself into a chair and reached again for the decanter.

"Ai! she is delicious—the madama whose husband plans mines and goes on long voyages! How she makes our women look tame!"

"Tah! She is insolent, that is all. We would lock up our women if they had the American way. Drink coffee—not more brandy."

"To the devil with your coffee! And it is not an American way—she is English—the delicious lady!"

"Worse still!" grunted Fernando.

"How?" roared Rafael, straightening up in his chair. "You forget, señor! She is my friend—my very illustrious friend—she is—no matter what she is. Her husband goes on long voyages—and you must apologize to me—you hear? I have the admiration for her—I—"

"You are drunk; that is what ails you, Rafael," said his friend, bluntly. "You think that you are in love with that woman, but you are only drunk."

"Drunk—I? And you call her—call the illustrious lady who is a friend of mine, 'that woman!' Señor, there are two swords on the wall. You take your choice—you—"

Fernando tried to avoid him, but he wrenched the sword from the wall and lunged at him wickedly.

But for a girl who shrieked and rushed from a shadowy doorway, and flung herself on the arm of Rafael, it would have gone ill with Fernando.

"Rafael mio!" she cried, clinging to him, "for the love of God!"

"Marta!" he cried, and dropped the weapon. "I —did I not tell you—"

He broke off vaguely, and avoided Fernando's eyes; that young man laughed good-naturedly.

"Another illustrious friend whose husband goes on long voyages!" he said, lightly. "I leave you, my friend, until you are sober. Señorita, adios."

Rafael stared moodily at the girl. She was a pretty bit of bronze flesh with passionate eyes.

"I told you to stay on the ranch," he said at last; but she broke into tears and caught his hands.

"I could not! They all know—the old woman and the priest. They thought I was dying, and he came and I had to tell him the name of the child's father; and—and when my own father comes back from the herding he will beat me, and I will not stay! I will not! He is not a fine gentleman, Rafael; he is only a herder who was a soldier in Mexico. Fine words would not count with him,

unless it would be words before the priest, and you promised—"

"Jesus, Maria, and Joseph!" burst out Rafael. "What an hour to come with a list of a man's promises! I've been up all night, and I'd fight with the saints if they came my way. Go, Marta; I will tell Antonio to make a home for you away from the crazy herder. I—I am very busy; I start south in an hour."

"But, Rafael—"

"Well—well?"

"They say you are to marry an illustrious señorita—that you—"

"They say a lot there is no sense in saying!" he burst out angrily. "If you had stayed on the ranch, you would not have heard their lies or—"

"Ai! I am happy that it is not true. But that one lady—whose hands you kissed—Rafael—"

"Oh, for the love of God, go!" he said. "You women drive a man mad! You—"

Fernando rushed in, interrupting him:

"Rafael! Your mother—she is here!"

"My mother?"

"On the hill—her carriage—a man brings the news."

"Damnation! Coming here—now? And my head

—Yes, it's true, Fernando; I was drunk. Help me to think! Make them clear all this away!" and he pointed to the tables and the dice and the cards on the floor. "Por Dios, how my head swims! And my mother is no fool—she will see! Think, Fernando! Help me to plan something. And you, Marta, let yourself not be seen!"

The frightened girl was only too glad to slip away, while the rest of the group stripped the rooms of evidences of the night's orgy.

"Mount a horse and ride to the beach," decided Fernando. "You will be gone on business, to see about—eh—to see if the vessel for hides has come in. Make yourself decent, and I will send a messenger after you. Don't be too easily found—you are likely to be drunker in an hour than you are now."

"Curse the brandy! And Bryton was to come back to see me about—oh, God knows what! But don't let my mother see him—an accursed heretic Americano, you know! Dios! If I could only sleep for an hour!"

Fernando fairly pushed him out at the door.

"Take a sea bath; drink black coffee; get out of sight while I receive the bride!"

Then, after the door was closed on the groom-elect, he took a quick survey of the room.

"That is right, open all the windows. Some one cut lilies—the white ones—quick! Hide this fan for Merced. Light those candles on the Virgin's shrine, and put the lilies there and on the table. Whose pipe is this under the edge of our lady's lace robe? It smells vilely—take it away! Where is the key of the chest of the *donas?* Here it is in the chest, and that is unlocked—only Rafael could do that. Let us hope he has not let Merced try on the wedding-dress! Are there no more flowers? Get some for the room of the señorita. Tell some one to make French coffee. Manuel, put out the light."

Dolores and Madalena ran through the open door, breathless.

"Fernando, she is here—the Señora Arteaga, and—"

"Already! Aunt Teresa told us to run and help; she will come also. Don Rafael?"

"Has ridden to the harbor."

"More likely to bed," remarked Madalena, skeptically.

"Señorita!"

"Sh—h!" whispered Dolores, with lifted hand. "The carriage; they are in the plaza!"

She rushed out, and the others followed. Teresa was there greeting Doña Luisa; but all fell suddenly

silent as they noticed the gray-white of the old face, and the frail figure as she descended from the carriage with the help of Fernando Mendez and Ana — his cousin's widow.

Fernando cast one glance at the girl who sat her horse and glanced over their heads for the face she did not see.

A wizened old Indian woman alighted from a cart and came to her and touched her foot on the stirrup.

"It is your new land, little mistress," she said, in a tongue not understood by the others, "the land of your handsome lover."

The girl looked again across the many faces gathering in the plaza, and then accepted the help of Don Antonio to alight.

"But he is not here, Polonia—the handsome lover," she returned, and then walked past all the others and slipped her hand under the arm of Doña Luisa.

"A thousand welcomes, señora," said Fernando, at the portal. "The town will rejoice to-day."

"One welcome I had a right to expect at this door," the old lady answered, "and he is not here."

"He will be heart-broken. He did not think you had yet reached San Diego. To-day he was to start for there. Will it please you to have this seat?"

"Not yet," she said. "Raquelita!"

Raquel Estevan gently disengaged her other hand from Dolores, and the frail old woman led her to the little shrine of the Virgin, where the candles glimmered. The others halted at the door, but Fernando and Dolores and Ana knelt also as the old woman and the girl from Mexico clasped hands and bent heads before the statue in the niche.

The old woman rose first and kissed the girl's forehead.

"My daughter," she said, faintly, "I welcome you for my son and for myself, to the land where you are mistress. Now, señor!"

Fernando placed a chair for her, and she sank into it wearily.

"My last journey, my children! You are the son of Manuel Mendez?—we called ourselves cousins once. I present you—all of you—to my daughter—Doña Raquel Estevan."

"At your feet, señorita!" said Fernando.

"I appreciate the honor of your acquaintance, señor," replied Raquel, in the conventional greeting of the day and land. Then the others crowded about, and spoke many pretty things of welcome. But in the midst of it all Doña Luisa arose, and leaning on Jacoba's arm, passed into the room prepared for her. The group left behind stared into each other's eyes.

"How frail! How could any creature like that make the journey?" asked Fernando. "She has been very ill."

"She *is* ill; we dare not mention it to her!'

"But Rafael—her son—"

"Must not be told, so she says; not until the wedding is over. All at once she has gone like that. It is the heart, señor, and she is old. It may be months—may be days—may be only hours, and we can do nothing but keep her quiet and happy."

"Santa Maria!" muttered Dolores, "and Rafael—"

"His heart it will break—no? To not see him at the door is like a bad omen. She likes not the new Americanos' way of business—to be gone at breakfast time to look at ships! But of course he is very good!"

"You are very good," replied Dolores. "Have they sent for Rafael?"

"I will see," said Fernando, and went away muttering, "The so good Rafael!"

"Oh! we have a thousand things to ask you, Raquel," said Madalena. "Could you have been a nun and been happy if—Rafael had not found you?"

"To work for Mother Church—is not that of happiness?"

"Never to dance! Never to hear a serenade!

Never to watch on moonlight nights for a handsome caballero!"

"I would as soon live in a tomb," confessed Dolores.

"But if you had never seen a dance, would you miss dancing? My mother's people were priests; she was to have been a nun. My blood and my teaching have been of the church. My life has been lived in one little narrow strip of the world. All at once the world changed. Sometimes it bewilders me, this change. You say 'happy,' but I don't think I know that word as you know it. Maybe I never shall learn it—who knows? But I can find work for the Church even here in the world, and you will all be my good friends, and—I shall be content."

Doña Luisa had entered the room while she was speaking, and nodded her approval.

"Content? You will be happy, my child; you will be with Rafael! Have you seen the chest of the *donas?* Is it not handsome? If we only had the key!"

"There is a little silver key on the shrine," said Dolores, and ran to get it.

"Aha! On the shrine of the Virgin!" said Doña Luisa. "Is that not love, Raquelita?"

"I am willing to believe it," she said, and took the

little key, only to hand it back to Dolores. "You open it—and may you be the next happy bride!"

Dolores rushed to unlock the chest, and Madalena to lift the lid, and Ana, as well as the older women, exclaimed at the richness of the contents.

"Ai! Raquel Estevan, thou happy one!" cried Ana; "you have more luck than a queen!"

They pulled out embroideries and laces and jewels, with little shrieks of ecstasy at the beauty and fineness of them. Raquel looked on, smiling at their delight.

"Aha! is not that a lover, Raquelita?" repeated Doña Luisa. "Bring me the mantillas. Those two are for the bridesmaids; see how they look on Madalena and Dolores—fine—fine! And here is the wedding-veil—and the shoes, and the rosary—not anything is forgotten! He is so dear, so good—my Rafael!"

The girls insisted on placing the wreath and veil on Raquel's head, but she broke from them at sight of a silken scarf of green and red and white.

"Ah! more than all the jewels!" she cried, and clasped it to her bosom. "The flag of my own Mexico! I will love him for that—I will love him with all my heart!"

"Ah! thou hast said it at last," said Doña Luisa, in triumph; "never forget thou hast said it!"

"When I say it," whispered Dolores to Ana, "it will be to the man, not to his mother."

"Come to me, daughter," said Doña Luisa, sinking back into a chair. "The heart feels—feels almost too happy! My deal Raquel—my dear Rafael!"

"The Americanos will be crazy to see this wedding in the old California fashion," said Madalena, adjusting Raquel's veil caressingly. "Señora Bryton would give her two ears—ouch! Doña Ana, you break my arm!"

"Give thanks it is not your neck, babbler!" muttered Ana. Doña Luisa looked at the two intently a moment.

"Who is the American señora of the two ears?" she inquired; "and why should the wedding of my son have interest for such—persons?"

"She—she was a cousin of Don Eduardo, and now she is married again—and she visits us, and her husband is some kind of engineer to make railroads, and mines, and—"

A pinch from Dolores stopped her this time, but it was very clumsily done, Doña Luisa saw it.

"Ah," she said, quietly; "and when is he to bring the railroad of the Americanos to the Californias, eh?"

The women and girls stared at each other.

"I—I cannot tell her," murmured Madalena to

Jacoba; "you speak! Of course it is not Doña Angela's husband who does it, but—the railroad does come—so they say."

"Why do you whisper, and not speak aloud?" demanded Doña Luisa, putting aside the hand of Raquel, who tried to quiet her rising resentment. "Is there not anyone here to speak plainly, and the truth? What is it you try to hide from me?"

"Oh, Luisa," begged Jacoba, tearfully, "do not make of this a thing to trouble you! No one tries really to hide things; it is not here the railroad is to be first; it is only talk; it may never happen — it may—"

"Where?" demanded Doña Luisa. And Jacoba, with tears in her eyes, confessed having heard of the impertinence of the Americanos, who meant to build a new road of their own instead of the wagon trail to San Antonio.

"That was good enough for our fathers. What is now wrong with the San Antonio road?"

"Not anything, of course; but the government—"

"Ah ha!" and the old voice lifted to a shrill note of triumph in having at last found the key of the question. "The American government! I thought that would be it. What new crime do they plan against the Californias? This it is to grow old and

lame — they would hide it from me! Speak, and tell me all! Does the fine new government want my home to quarter their pigs of soldiers in, as they did in the Mission in other days? And would my friends have hidden it from me until these upstarts were across my door?"

"Luisa — chulita — you were not well. Rafael said you were not to be told; but since you think we mean to speak falsely, or deceive you —"

"Where is it to come? How near?" Doña Luisa was not to be led an iota from the main question. But at her demand, Jacoba tried to speak, and failed, and could only weep noisily at the hardness in her old cousin's tones.

"Why do you make Aunt Jacoba weep like that?" demanded Ana, resentfully. "What has she to do with the railroads — she or her family? Your good Rafael does more to bring them than any one else. He sells them land; he and Don Eduardo help them to get the rights to go where they please. Aunt Jacoba would not do that; her father and her husband would be burned at the stake before they would help these new people to use the graves of the holy fathers at San Gabriel as a road-bed!"

"Mother of God!"

Doña Luisa arose, as though to annihilate the

daring speaker; but Raquel caught her and she sank back in her chair with one tremulous hand extended to the frightened Ana.

"Go on!" she said, hoarsely. "Go on! Perjure thy soul with lies, since thou lovest them so,—lies against a son of Mother Church. Go on!"

Ana shrank, and faltered, but the accusation brought back her courage.

"If the truth is shameful, the shame is not mine," she retorted. "Through two of the Arteaga ranches in the north has Rafael sold the right of way for the American railroad to Monterey. That it might come closer to his ranch-houses, he has let it be built across the forgotten graves of the Mission fathers. Beneath the feet of the Americanos will lie the holy apostles of our Mother Church! The Protestant heretics will wheel their pigs to market across the gardens where Ava Marias have sounded all the years of religion in California!"

Doña Luisa stared at her with white face, and her lips moved stiffly when she tried to speak. The other women and girls were clinging together in tears, and Raquel stood with her strong young arms about her, as though to guard her against the world.

Bryton, who had strolled back through the patio for a final word with Rafael, had heard nothing of the

arrivals; he pushed open the door at the back, and then halted at the sight of the group there,—the women and girls frightened and weeping, the scattered wealth of silks and laces flung across chairs and tables, and the three girls with bride-like veils.

"Is it—a witchcraft?" half whispered Doña Luisa at last; but the whisper was plainly heard above the sobs of the girls, who scarcely dared to breathe. "It is a work of the fiends to snare his soul for hell Immaculate Mother, let it not be!"

Raquel bent above her with murmured assurances of divine help, and the old woman suddenly caught the hands of the girl in her own and held her, staring in her face with questioning eyes; then she spoke eagerly, fiercely.

"Your wish but a moment ago! You wished for some great work for Mother Church—to fight evil out in the world; your guardian angel heard the wish and has sent you a soul to save from the heretics,—the soul of the man you love!"

Raquel stared at her, but did not speak. Her eyes looked a bit frightened, but she rested her cheek on the frail old hands, and caressed them reassuringly.

Doña Luisa lifted the gold and ebony crucifix, and held it above her head.

"Kneel!" she said; and the girls and women did

so. Bryton, in the doorway, caught sight of the girl in the bride's veil, and made a movement toward her, but was checked by the voice of the mother.

"It is for the soul of the man you love, Raquel mia. Never forget that — never forget!"

"I will not forget," said the girl, gently; and at the sound of the voice Keith Bryton's jaw set in a tense, ugly way, and he stepped back into the shadow.

"Then swear by the Holy Mother of God!" said the old voice, and the crucifix above the head of the kneeling girl was held rigidly steady.

"I swear by the Holy Mother of God!"

"Swear by the blood of Christ crucified!"

"I swear by the blood of Christ crucified!"

"To stand as a guard over the soul of Rafael!" The old voice had a faintness, despite the steady words; the end of her strength had come.

The eyes of Raquel widened ever so little as she realized what she was promising. There was an involuntary pause before she spoke again, and then the absolute despair of the mother, and her one hope, swept over the the girl's consciousness, and a spark of the martyr fire lit her own soul.

"To stand as guard over the soul of Rafael," said she, steadily.

"So long as you both shall live!"

"So long as — we both — shall — live."

Then the crucifix fell to the tiled floor, and the old face looked very gray, as she sank back on the chair; and Jacoba smothered a shriek at sight of her eyes; and Raquel, still on her knees, clasped her about the waist and whispered:

"Doña Luisa, Doña Luisa!"

The staring eyes regained a momentary glimmer of consciousness at the sound of the girl's voice, and she lifted her hand again as though it still held the crucifix.

"Until — the day — of — " and then the sentence trailed along into the eternal silences of the unseen land.

"Señora!" called Raquel, appealingly; but Ana caught her by the shoulder and looked in her face, and said:

"God help you, Raquel Estevan! To the recording angel she has taken that oath."

. . . . . .

Keith Bryton closed the door on the weeping women, and walked out through the old refectory to the inner court, where he met Fernando.

"What is it, señor?" he asked. Bryton looked at him much as though he had not been there.

"I — I scarcely know," he said, dully. "You had better —"

"But you have the face of a ghost!" interrupted Fernando. "Something has happened—in there?"

"I think so," agreed the American, recovering under Fernando's curious gaze. "Some one is ill—or—"

Fernando ran past him, and Bryton walked slowly along the inner court to where the one-time baptistry lay roofless to the sky. Through an old doorway with the Aztec sun cut in the coping, he passed into the old graveyard of the padres, and thence to the great altar-place of the old earthquake ruin. Even there the cries of the girls came to him through an open window—a wailing chorus of tragedy. Then an old Indian untied the ropes of the belfry, and the toll of death sounded along the valley. But it seemed very far away. He stared at the half-pagan decorations of the old stonework—never the cross of Christ anywhere on them—and sat so still that two linnets lit almost at his feet and were not afraid.

"I wondered why I should stray back to this little corner of the world," he said at last, "and now—now I reckon I 'm finding out. God! I feel like a bad dream. And my hands tied!"

He paced back and forth on the old altar-place, until the mad clatter of hoofs coming from the sea cut across the tolling of the bells and told him the

lost bridegroom—the man she said she loved and would never forget—had been found.

He swore softly as he crossed the plaza to the veranda of Juan Alvara. The old man, rolling his first cigarro of the day, was sitting there on the bench in the early sunlight.

"Don Juan," he said, holding out his hand, "I ride to catch up with the officers and go with them into the Indian country, and I may not see San Juan again for a long time. Your home has always been a pleasant place, and I thank you for many courtesies."

The old man shook his hand gravely.

"Adios! You come back to San Juan—no?"

"Perhaps not," said Bryton. "If there is anything I can do for you in Los Angeles—"

"Thanks, señor; there is nothing. My daughters go there in a week with the wedding party. For whom think you old Tomás tolls the bell?"

When informed, he stared vaguely at the Americano. Alvara was growing old. Teresa had warned them all that no one should tell him until his breakfast was over and he had had his smoke.

"Luisa! the Doña Luisa! Dead, you say?—before the wedding-day? No, señor, pardon, but you have not understood. I know Luisa Arteaga when she is

still a little girl—and always. She not dying before she have marry the boy like she want."

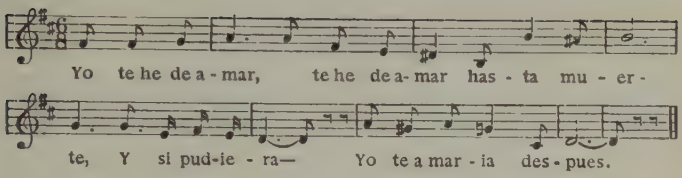
Still, his hand trembled as he reached for his cane. Across the plaza Indians and Mexicans were moving toward the Mission. It was early for San Juan to be astir in the street. Old Matia, who had been nurse to Miguel and Rafael, went past, not seeing the two men for the tears in her eyes. Yes—after all, there was trouble—but Doña Luisa!

In his perturbation he turned, and again held out his hand.

"Adios, señor," he repeated; "but you coming back for sure. To San Juan all people coming back some time. You go with the horses across the deserts?"

"Yes, I am going across the deserts. Adios!"

El Corazon.



CHAPTER VII

HE had crossed the ranges twice and returned, but the City of the Angels had lost its old witchery.

The rose-tinted dawns, and the amethystine dusks were beautiful as ever, but to banish the memories he had once dreamed over there, he galloped alone to the harbor called "The Hell of California," and lay all one day on the beach, and stared moodily at the waves whipping the yellow sands of San Pedro.

To the south there, far beyond the prosaic stretch of grazing-lands bordered by the sea, beyond all the tame levels where the water was green or yellow in the shallows, beyond all the jutting points, veiled in the miles of mists, he could follow in his mind each

curve, until the one valley of beauty would gleam like a green jewel seen from the cliffs of San Juan.

And at the foot of those cliffs there were no flat stretches of color such as make weary the eye; the water there held all the shimmering, bewitching, iridescence of a peacock's feathers,—the gold and purple, the greens and the blues ever changing,—the strange touch of pink making it all glorious in certain glints of the sunlight; and at the edge of it all, the fringe of foam—a string of pearls shattered on the brown cliffs or sandy beach, and gathered up to be dashed again and again and again—the endless garniture of old Ocean's robe.

Never on any other shore had mere waves, running to the sand, the same witchery. Alvara had said that all men came back some day to San Juan. What witchery was it by which its mesa and its valley and its wonderful shore were forever set apart from other shores of California? Some mystery of life brooded there from sea to mountain, suggesting so much which was left for poor humanity to solve; it was only a whispered suggestion, dim and delightful, as the music of the waves heard from the Mission plaza, or as dreamy as the high film of fog, drifting high up and tempering the sun's rays until they fell softly as a benediction on the valley between blue sea and blue summit.

"Never on Any Other Shore"

His own life stretched before him like the brown levels and yellow flatness of San Pedro; and there to the south, miles across the ranges, was the heart of the dreamland he must not enter: another man had that claim under fence. He gave voice to some self-condemnation of a sort reserved for men who go *loco* over a woman who forgets, and after hours of brooding there alone by the shore, arrived at only one decision — the California of the south ranges was no longer his own. All the width of it was now narrowed to one little valley, where the poppies flamed over forgotten graves and adobe walls, and the doves circled above a ruined chancel.

He rode into town, where some kind friends mentioned that Don Rafael Arteaga and his bride were being *fêted* by the leading Spanish families of Los Angeles, and he was invited to a dinner in their honor a week hence.

"I go to Mexico — I start to-day," he answered, briefly. Ten minutes before, he had not thought of it.

"To Mexico? You cover ground fast these days, Don Keith. On the new road of iron they mean to make, you could not go so much faster than on the horses you ride; you have the good American luck in the pick of them."

"Yes, the good American luck!" said Keith Bryton,

with a touch of bitterness. "May your saints send you a better!"

A man who stood near, and who much desired the invitation Bryton had refused, shrugged his shoulders as the Americano mounted his horse and rode away.

"What better luck could a man have, than a chance to meet Doña Raquel Estevan de Arteaga?" he queried of any who might care to answer. "The bishop himself shows her honor, and they say she is working for the Church against Downing, the Englishman, who holds the Mission lands under Pico's sale. Sixteen years has the Church fought for those lands in the courts; if she gets them back, she deserves the pope's blessing. And the fool boy of an Americano rides south when he could meet her—perhaps touch her hand!"

But the fool Americano rode south and kept on riding south for many dusty days. He crossed a corner of the Yaqui country, and then across the ranges to the old mine, called the Mine of the Temple—the one of which he had told Don Juan Alvara—was it so few weeks ago? It might have been years instead of weeks, by his own feeling and attitude of mind. He was riding back a different man. He evaded the few Mexicans as he neared the mine; no turn of the trail was lonely for him. Memory

kept pace, and the murmur of one girl's voice spoke through the rustling leaves of the mountains.

A travelling priest, jubilant at the idea of comradeship, hailed him in one of the mountain passes, and found him but a sorry companion.

"This is a country," said the padre, "where the sight of a white face is most welcome. Six months since I was sent to this parish, and few of them have I seen. Now, I ride out of my way just to talk with an American who works a mine up here. Your brother, is it? Well, he has a good name with the brown folks. A lot of pagans they are! It is not a priest they need here; it is a missionary the bishop should send to teach them their religion anew. If ever they had any, it has been lost."

But it was evidently the opinion of the padre that they had never really secured any to lose. He discoursed at some length on the failure of the Church to impress upon them the advantage of marriage. Few were the wedding fees to be obtained from the Mexicans, while the heathen Indians had some form of their own, arranged by the head of their clan, and it was a disgrace to a land held under cross and crown for two centuries — an endless shame!

Keith assented, without heeding the list of Indian iniquities. He was rather glad, after all, that Teddy

had a civilized neighbor, willing to be companionable. Teddy liked people too well to exile himself from them but for the one thing — to go back north, able to cover one white throat with pearls, or two white hands with diamonds.

His greeting of his half-brother was a bit shy, though wholly glad, and the padre served to bridge over the first few awkward moments. Both men recognized the fact of a change in each since the Los Angeles days. Teddy thought it due only to his clandestine marriage, and Keith felt guilty as he realized how little, how very little, Teddy's marriage meant to him now. While the padre was getting acquainted with the Mexican, the two brothers walked apart, and talked of the chances of the mine's success, and the failure of the backers to see the necessity of using money more freely on the enterprise.

"It's there, you know," insisted Teddy; "all this district is flooded with stories of the ore taken out of it in the first days of the Spaniards; then the Indians descended upon them, and there was a slaughter, and no Spaniard dared venture into these hills for a century."

"Yes. We put in a good many fruitless days trailing those old legends," assented Keith, "but only the Indian superstition tends to show that this

is the real mine of that history. The rich one may not have been on this side of the mountain, since you have not yet struck the lode."

"Don't let 's talk about it, if you feel that way," suggested Teddy, "I hear plenty of that from the others; and you didn't really come all the way down here to talk mines. Say, old chap, you acted like a prince over the — well, the wedding. I felt pretty nearly three inches higher when I got your letter. I—I know I acted like a kid, but Angela wanted it arranged so; and — as she about filled the whole horizon — "

"Cut out the explanation, Teddy. A man is never sure of himself until the right woman crosses his trail—or the wrong one. God knows I 'm not fit for alcalde in the case. At least, you married your wife."

Teddy stared at him an instant, and then shouted with laughter.

"Married my wife? Well, rather! How else could she be my wife?"

Keith avoided the frank boyish blue eyes of Teddy, and turned away, seating himself on a great bowlder and staring across the little semicircle of the cañon basin, to where gnarled century-old trees reached grotesque arms above some old stone ruins and fragments of marble. Teddy looked at him an instant, and then whistled softly.

"If it were any other man than you, Keith, I'd think—but it's too ridiculous!"

"Say it," suggested Keith.

"Well, I'd say the wrong woman had crossed *your* trail."

"Not the wrong one."

"Good Lord! you don't mean that by any chance it is at last the right one?"

"At last—the right woman."

"And you sit there looking as solemn over it as a wooden Mexican god! Wake up, old fellow, and tell about her."

"There is nothing to tell. She is the right woman, and I shall never see her again."

"Keith!"

"And I've come back here to tell myself so," continued Keith, doggedly; "to say it over and over, and beat it into my brain, if I have any left. The desert didn't help me—I thought this might."

"This?"

"These hills, and—speaking of it."

His brother said nothing, only looked at him in wonder, as he rose with hands thrust in pockets and walked the length of the little terrace formed by the refuse of the mine. The two brothers had changed places. It was now Keith, the cool, the

indifferent, who had crossed some line of emotional experience where speech was a relief — Keith, of all men! Teddy wondered who the woman could be; she would be worth seeing.

"So you see, Ted," observed the other, with a forced laugh, "you need not explain things to me. When the woman comes, none of us cares much what the other fellow thinks."

"If she is the right woman, I'm mighty sorry, old man, that it's going to be as you say — that you are not going to see her again."

"Don't waste good sorrow! I'm the only fool in the case — she doesn't care."

"That's not so easy to believe," declared Teddy, loyally. "You probably only asked her once, and then hit the trail before she could change her mind."

"Ask her. When people care, words are not so necessary."

"Perhaps not, but girls do expect words; though the right girl — "

"She doesn't know that she was the right girl; I may not have made it clear. I was a fool who dreamed dreams and believed them true. Talking about it doesn't help. I thought it might; that's all."

He continued to walk the terrace, as though with a certain impatience at having let go of himself. Teddy

regarded him for a few moments of awkward silence. Keith had never been demonstrative, and this sudden confidence caught Teddy unprepared. He felt ill at ease, realizing that it was no light sentiment, causing him to let go of himself and speak.

"I reckon this particular mountain must be bewitched," he said at last. "The only other time you talked of a girl — any special girl — was after we were led across yon range by that girl of the convent. Even then you talked of her only when the knock on your head sent you luny. What was the name they called her? Spirit — Doña Spirit — Doña Espiritu! That is it! I really thought for a few days of your ravings that we were going to have a nun in the family; and now it's a new girl!"

Keith regarded him for a moment, then in silence took out tobacco and made a cigarette. Of what use were words?

"I always wondered who that girl was and what became of her," continued Teddy. "The old padre was as dumb as an oyster on the subject. Did you learn more than her name?"

"Not much," said Keith, briefly.

"I always meant to. Funny how those crackbrained Indians let up on the attack that night, when she slipped that ring on your finger and held up your

hand for them to see. It was the last thing I noted before I keeled over. Those Indians have not forgotten that. They knew when I came back here, and they seemed to watch either the mine or me,—I don't know which it is. Once they asked an old Mexican for you; he speaks their lingo. They described you as 'the man of the ring.'"

"That's queer."

"Did the girl tell you what the ring meant?"

"Meant?" repeated Keith, questioningly.

"Yes. To the tribe, it means more than a mere ring. The old Mexican gathered that much. It had something the significance of a sceptre, and was worn only by one of the rulers in the old days. When that girl put it on your finger, the tribe thought it meant that she had picked you out for marriage. She didn't tell you?"

"No, she didn't tell me."

"Well, it's all that saved our lives that night. You know the old padre is dead. It was he did the sleight-of-hand work in getting the girl out of sight before you got on your feet again. With some threat of eternal flames, he shut the lips of every Mexican I tried to bribe to find her."

Keith took the cigarette from his lips, and looked at him without speaking. Teddy smiled and nodded.

"Yes, I looked for her without your knowing it. You came nearer going 'over the range' in that fever than you ever realized. The English doctor down there asked me who the devil 'Espiritu' was, and said that she could probably do more to lower your temperature than his drugs. I tried to locate her, as soon as I could hobble on a crutch, but it was no use. The padre said she had taken the black veil: that shut us out."

"Yes, of course," assented Keith, absently.

"You never mentioned her name after you got on your feet, so I figured that it did not really mean anything. Girls never did mean much to you, individually, Keith,—until now."

"Until now."

"And now it's no use, since you can't see her again."

Keith puffed away in thoughtful silence before he spoke.

"Perhaps not. Yet—*quien sabe?* A sentiment may be like a sunrise, lifting clouds for you and making you see things—things within yourself you never suspected were there. Our trail in these hills followed the light of the morning star once, and we got out of the wilderness to safety: that star has meant something to me ever since. I can't possess it,

but the meaning of it is mine. I can't give myself to the right woman,"—and he held out his hand and looked at it,—"but no conventions of the world, no man-made walls can prevent the thought of me from going to her—the thought which, after all, is the real me. When that is so, who can say that even an unknown love has not its own uses? It may prove the illumination of a whole lifetime."

Teddy, with wonder in his eyes, laid his hand on his brother's shoulder. "Old man, that kind of feeling is beyond me. I want my girl with me, and I want her mighty bad. I've lived beside you all my life, and never dreamed it was in you to care like that for any woman. It only shows how little we know, after all."

"Yes; how little, after all, until the right woman crosses the trail."

"The chances are that we can never talk of it again. I know you *that* much! I told you this old hill of the temple was uncanny—bewitched,—and it is. You never would have mentioned this to me in civilized places."

"Perhaps not," agreed Keith. And you're right—I could never speak of it again."

They never did. That night they talked only of Teddy's enterprise, and covered much paper with many figures, and made fine plans for the future.

The next day it was that Keith, hunting in the hills, heard an unusual blast from the mine, felt the ground tremble from the shock, and turning back on the trail, met a Mexican with a bleeding hand and a cut face, who urged him to hasten. It was the word of the padre!

He reached Teddy's side only in time to accept "Angela — poor little Angela —" as a life-long legacy. There had been an explosion. Graves were made for the young engineer and three of his Mexican miners on the side of the mountain. When it was all over, Keith Bryton climbed to the heights above, where the broken walls of stone showed white and gray among forest growth on the temple terrace. Below, and beyond the ranges, lay the world. In his isolation of grief, he felt as alone as the solitary mountain rising from the plain below, through which a river ran. Far down the river, miles away, gleamed a cross on the chapel of a convent. It was the old Mexican pueblo of which he had told Alvara. He remembered saying to the old man that he would never come back; yet here he was. How useless to say what one will or will not do in this world! One must make allowance for the moves fate insists upon in the game of life.

Back of him, on a slight elevation, stood some

broken columns, and half an arch yet showed where an entrance had been, and under a dwarfed and twisted oak half covered with tropical vines a bench of marble gleamed. Two birds fluttered to the ground near him and turned inquisitive eyes on the intruder. He watched them carelessly, until one of them perched on a fallen block of stone ornamented with the sculptured sun of the Aztecs. It brought back like a flash that other day when he went from the presence of death to a ruined altar-place, where the Aztec sun and the cactus commemorated some unknown Mexican sculptor who cut the symbol of the faith of his people into the walls of a Christian church.

He closed his eyes, and the vision of that other day was only intensified. The wind in the oaks back of him sounded like the surf on San Juan's beach; and through it the slow, fateful words of a girl kneeling in her wedding-veil echoed in his ears as it had done a thousand times:

"So long — as — we — both — shall live!"

There were no weeping girls here, and no bells to toll out the death message; but otherwise the atmosphere of the place, and the illusion, were perfect. How—how had he chanced to enter into this half-pagan atmosphere of death? Unconsciously,

automatically, he turned and re-turned on his finger the onyx ring at which Angela had laughed.

He was still seated there when the miners who had filled the graves came up the path, and with them the priest from the plains below. The Mexicans halted outside the broken walls. Only one Indian, who had followed at a distance, crossed the line of entrance, and stood apart, watching and listening in a furtive way — watching the American especially.

"Many times I have heard of this place," said the priest, "but never before have I been so far into the mountain. There are strange old traditions of it in the accounts some of the early padres left. Their king or chief became Christian and gave his sons to the Church, but the main body of the people kept to many of their pagan rites. And this was their temple. The men ask me if you continue with the mining, señor."

He noticed they all listened for the answer, and looked relieved when he said, "No."

"They are all very glad, señor. They ask me to tell you they have no ill will, but they say not any of their men will go into the mine of the temple."

"Some superstition?"

"It seems so. They say one man always dies when outsiders meddle with the mountain, but never

before have three men died at once. They ask you to let the company know that none of them will come back."

"Very good," and Bryton arose and picked up the sombrero he had dropped beside him. "I will tell them to bring foreigners if they mean to keep on; but I doubt it. The cave-in down there means a fortune to dig out. I don't think they have the capital."

He was turning away, when he noticed the Indian. "Is he a workman?"

The others exchanged glances, and then one of them stepped forward.

"No, señor. He is one of the mountain people. No one knows where they live. I know a little of their talk. He says for us all to go away, or worse things will always happen. He — he wants to speak to you."

"Well?"

The man hesitated, and then said a few words, and the Indian replied in a strange jargon with peculiar aspirated syllables.

"He says," continued the interpreter, hesitatingly, "to ask if she is to come back."

"She?"

Bryton's face flushed, as the priest looked at him curiously.

"You have known those people before?"

"I — my brother and I were lost once in the forest here. We — well, we were made to feel we had trespassed; but some one — a sort of missionary among them — made them lead us to the plain. It would have been better if my brother had never come back."

"And —?"

The priest noticed Bryton's hesitation; so did the Indian, for he walked direct to him, and pointed to the ring he wore, and looked from the ring to Bryton's face.

"Tell him," said the American, "that she is a man's wife, and lives in a lovely land."

"You see her — some day?" asked the Indian.

"No — not ever again — perhaps."

The Indian bent his head, and with a slight gesture as of farewell, turned and walked swiftly away from them, around the bend of the mountain.

"Your words have an unusual interest," said the priest, as they walked down toward the plain. "They suggest that the missionary might be the one they spoke of here as the Indian nun."

"This lady was not Indian," said Keith, decidedly. "Her skin was whiter than either yours or mine. The Indians called her Doña Espiritu! It was the only name they knew her by."

"It was the same, and her father's name was Estevan," said the priest, quietly.

"Yes, I know now. His name was Estevan, but—"

"And he was the man who died the awful death up there." And he pointed back to the temple.

"No!" Bryton stopped on the path and faced the priest, thus halting the entire procession at a point where a yawning gulf of a cañon reached to unseen depths below.

"For the love of Christ—señor!" screamed the priest, while the Mexicans in the rear clung to their burros and swore.

"The man who was killed left no child," persisted Bryton. "I heard the story."

"A daughter was born six months after his death—after the wife had taken the black veil of eternal renunciation of the world," declared the priest, solemnly. "Now, señor, for the love of God, will you let us find safer footing?"

"Oh, yes. Pardon me!" and Bryton continued thoughtfully along the trail to the plain below. When they reached a broader road where it was possible to ride abreast, he asked one more question.

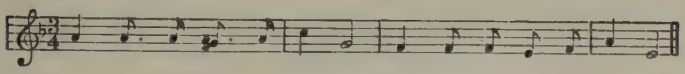
"Father, does she know?"

"Not unless some in the world have told her.

Here, the old priest, her uncle, had power enough over the wild tribe to make them promise they would not tell her until she had lived twenty years. He died ten years ago, but they kept faith. There are some people in the world who had to know, — the lawyers and judges who settled the estate, — for Estevan was a man of wealth. He carried wounds here from the war for California. The child thought he died from the effects of those. Out in the world where she has gone, that wild barbaric outbreak of her mother's people will never be known; and of the few who have learned it who would tell her?"

"True, father: who would?"

La Passion Funesta



CHAPTER VIII

HE did not go north for a month. His letter to Angela contained a check, which she at once invested in very becoming mourning, for which she of course had to journey to Los Angeles.

With her went Don Eduardo Downing and his wife, Doña Maria, who, with Rafael, had unpleasant business to transact with the bishop, and were irritable in consequence. Bryton called upon them at the home of the ex-Governor of California. After Angela's first emotional outburst at the details of Teddy's death and burial, — and regret that a Protestant clergyman was not to be had, — she managed to come back to subjects nearer home, and retail a few of the changes since the death of Doña Luisa.

There had not been time for many. Yet — well — there had been the marriage, of course; and the

relations who thought it so fine a thing that Rafael married an heiress and a saint were not so sure now. The tone of Angela and her slight shrug of contempt showed that she shared their doubts.

Raquel Estevan de Arteaga was in the city. She had ridden the sixty miles on horseback, and all the old Spanish families were entertaining her in a style magnificent as their means would allow; but all who cared to have her must invite no heretic Americans, and it was understood to be a promise to Doña Luisa. She did not wish to meet the English-speaking people; not one had yet crossed her threshold; even Don Eduardo, sharing some business interests with her husband, was not welcomed, because he held fields of the old Mission, for which the Church was fighting in the courts of law.

The bishop himself had set the pace for courtesy toward Raquel. He had called on her personally, had a long private interview (Angela's opinion of clerical private interviews with young wives was expressed by another shrug), and he made a point of calling on several families where she visited.

Doña Maria was of course justly offended. Her estates had been greater than those of the Arteagas, and her family name was older in the land than Estevan, which after all was only Spanish for Stevens.

On this subject it was easy to see Angela agreed perfectly with the wife of her cousin. Each had built her own plan for certain social supremacies in the little kingdom of San Juan, but neither had reckoned with the fact that the girl from a convent in Mexico would assume a rule there such as no one else had ever dared attempt, and emphasize it by barring out heretics, even when married into Catholic families.

What Rafael thought of it no one yet knew. He hated the old Mission, above all places. The only time it was worth while was when the dances were held in the old dining-room; and when his mother died he thought of course no woman would ever wish to live there. A town residence was assured, and thus closer connection with the new, progressive people. But the bride of a day had decided differently: when a home befitting their station was built for her in San Juan, she would move to it; until then the Mission rooms would serve, and they must arrange it with the bishop.

To tell her that the bishop no longer had jurisdiction over the property was of no use whatever. She had listened quietly to the legal details of the auction sale, when it had all been bought by Eduardo Downing and Miguel Arteaga.

"That is right, to buy it when the place was sold for debt; any son of the Church should do that," she conceded; "but to hold it, — to treat it as a quarry from which to mine bricks and blocks of stone, — may the saints intercede for your brother in his grave, who did such wickedness! If your mother had known that a son of hers was fighting in the courts of law against the Church, it would have killed her the day the word reached her. If you people value money more than the blessing of God, I will give you money for it — to you and your English partner; but not another blast of powder must shatter the place of the altar."

It was in vain they told her Doña Maria had a pious plan to blow down the stonework — the most magnificent monument of such Indian labor ever erected in that part of Mexico which is now United States, — and to build on its site an adobe chapel of her own design. Raquel Estevan de Arteaga listened quietly to all the plans, but shook her head.

"It is sacrilege; it shall not be," she repeated. "Since gold is the god of the English people, we will give them gold."

"But you forget, beloved," put in Rafael. "Doña Maria is Catholic — is Spanish — is —"

"Rafael," said his bride, quietly, "will you listen a little? Then it will be no need to speak of those

things again — we will both understand. The padre comes a stranger to San Juan as I do, but he comes from a strange land, and cares not anything for these different races. But I have all the names of those people from your mother, that I know whom to avoid in this life — and in the next."

"My mother was one of the old Spanish people; they were slow. Times change."

"Yes, times did change when men like Alvarado were pushed aside and a quadroon ruled the politics and the Mission property. Thus California paved the way for American rule. In politics and business men must meet unpleasant people often, but it is not ever necessary for the ladies of any family to do so; and, Rafael, here before your padre, two things I must say. The heretics I have promised never to meet except as God sends them in our path. As for the Spanish ladies you mention, if you do not know that there is not a woman of noble Spanish blood in the length of this valley, then you shut your eyes very tight when you might see. The daughters of Don Juan Alvara have one Spanish strain in them; the others are mixed people of Mexican, Indian, and negro, and few of them care to remember their grandmothers. When you bring into my house Spanish ladies of good breeding, I shall be glad

to make them welcome, but I do not care for the substitutes. The Indios by the river are of more interest, for they need to be taught."

This conversation had been repeated by Padre Andros to Doña Maria over a game of *malia* and a glass of the new American drink called whiskey,—a gift from the army officers, and enjoyed very much by the ladies of San Juan; it suggested a drink made of chilis, because of the appetizing burn it gave the throat.

Padre Andros was frightened when he saw the effect of his recital. Doña Maria was not so stout as most of the women of the mixed races; but as he saw the dark color mount luridly to her face, and her eyes look almost bloodshot with sudden fury, he set down the glass of whiskey to cross himself, and dropped an ace in his perturbation.

"For the love of God! señora," he exclaimed; and then it was Angela entered the room and found her cousin's wife ill with a fury she durst express only in prayers and maledictions against this girl brought to San Juan by Doña Luisa to ruin them all!

Only fragments of the cause of her fury reached Angela, despite all her sudden sympathetic interest in the wife of her cousin, to whom she had heretofore been rather indifferent. But she pieced the fragments

together, and as she told them to Bryton he could, with his own knowledge of the early racial mixtures in the land, get a very fair idea of the situation. The girl from Mexico had dared open the closet of a forgotten skeleton.

"Of course she rules Rafael just now, to a certain extent," conceded Angela, carelessly. "He sees the Church and half the town at her feet here; she is a novelty, and he sees everyone turn to look at her. But at San Juan she will find no one at her feet, and her churchmen will be far enough away. The padre there detests her; she stopped him from selling bricks from the cloister pillars."

"The padre and Doña Maria should make a strong team," observed Bryton. "The woman need be strong to win against them — is she?"

"How do I know? I've never spoken to her. She has nasty eyes. That's all I can remember of her."

"Nasty?"

"Oh, it is the expression. I saw them once, and she made me nervous. Perhaps it was because she divined that I was one of the 'accursed heretics.' I understand that is the way the lower order speak of Protestants!"

"But she cannot be quite of the lower order, can she? Her father was of the best Spanish and

American blood ever joined on this coast, far above the Arteagas."

"Oh! So you also look up pedigrees here; I wonder why."

"It is a country where you hear of them without question," he returned, indifferently. "The people are always sparring among themselves and referring to their ancestors — if they dare. Doña Luisa was a pure-blood Spanish woman, but the Arteagas had a bad Indian and Mexican streak. She saw it develop in her own children, and it gave her a bad fright. She counted on this marriage bringing the last of them back to the old conservative manner of life."

"Ah!" She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously; "but you forget that Raquel, the present Señora Arteaga, has also a Mexican streak."

"No, I don't forget; but there are high class and low of every race. Noble Indians and high-class Mexicans have gone into history. The American makes a great mistake when he judges the high classes by the masses. In this land one has to dig out the facts of each individual line, if he wants to know the truth of a pedigree. But the lady from Mexico seems to have drawn her distinctions very closely, and realizing her own superiority, she dares dictate."

"Even to her — husband?" There was just the slightest possible hesitation at the title.

"Why not, if she is the superior?"

"But — oh, can't you see how all these marriages are a barter-and-sale family affair, — money that is married, instead of people? If she was in love with him as a — a real woman would be, she never would know she was superior, never! Not that I believe she is," she added with a shrug; "to me she looks as wooden as the saints on her own altar."

He arose and walked to the window, staring out over the heads of the people.

"She may not be wooden to those she cares for," he said at last.

"Perhaps not; but I'm certain of one thing: if she ever cared for any one, it is not the man she married. If she cared, she would forget that rigid fanatic sense of duty sometimes."

"I came to talk of your affairs," he said, abruptly. "Teddy left some mining shares; they may pan out later on. I have talked with a lawyer about them; this is his address," and he handed her a slip of paper. "Whatever funds are procurable he will turn over to you quarterly. Is there anything else I can do for you at present?"

"Yes," she returned; "you might be a bit human

and sympathetic. You seem to forget," and her red lip quivered in self-pity, "how utterly alone I am among these Mexicans, and all their women jealous as fiends."

He regarded her with a long, steady stare, and then smiled as he rose.

"I don't blame them," he observed, quietly. "You have given more attention to several of their men than you ever gave to poor Ted. Where's your baby?"

"Heavens! Do you suppose I could drag her on this trip, and a Mexican or Indian nurse?" she demanded, impatiently. "That's so like a man! They think a woman with a child should be merely a domestic animal, like those dunces of Spanish women. I feel as if I were in jail, hedged around with all their conventions. I don't dare walk on the street alone, or with a man; I don't dare ride in a carriage with a man, and it's no pleasure to go with those empty-headed women. Doña Maria is as bad as the rest since I'm in mourning; it is a sort of prison, forbidding the wearer a free breath!"

"Take it off," he suggested, so quietly that he quite deceived her, and she uttered a little cry of shocked appeal.

"Keith! And poor Teddy—"

"Angela!" and his hand fell heavy on her shoulder, "listen to me just once. When Ted was alive I could bear to hear you mention his name, but now that he is dead I — can't. He belongs to me now, and I forbid it."

"Keith!" She gasped again, but this time in sheer fright. "And the money — the shares you — "

He laughed mirthlessly, and took his hand from her shoulder. His moment of feeling gave place to amused appreciation of the real woman poor Ted had never known.

"Who says women are inconsistent?" he queried. "You are a living illustration of the contrary. I have never seen you vary a hair's-breadth from my first instinctive feeling concerning you, you pretty baby kitten! You need n't look so frightened; you will get whatever money is in reach. Now, don't go to whimpering! Get on your bonnet, if Doña Maria may think it allowable for me to take you both for a carriage drive. I promised Ted to do things for you, and I must make a beginning."

"Is that the only reason?" she began, with righteous indignation.

"That is the only reason, my lady," he returned. "Are you coming?"

A little later they were rolling along Spring Street,

past the plaza, and many heads turned to look at the golden-haired girlish little figure in mourning, drooping beside Doña Maria, whose rigid, unsmiling, dark features were the best possible foil. Keith Bryton, sitting opposite, noticed the admiration she aroused. The caballeros who had swept sombreros to the ground at the passage of the carriage in which Raquel and the bishop were riding did so as a matter of reverence to a devotee; but the rule of the woman whom Keith had called a baby kitten would always be one of childish appeal, personal to a degree.

Looking at her cynically, he tried to fancy her twenty years ahead,—the mother of a grown daughter,—but failed. The daughter would have to be guardian; the mother would always need one. She was watching him furtively to see the effect this open admiration might have upon him. He was the one man of them all who had ever dared treat her so carelessly. His attitude had piqued her to the point where she had a brief tigerish desire to rend his heart—his affections—if he had any! And Teddy was the weapon.

Of course she had regretted it all—there were other men with so much more money. Still, as it had turned out, it was not so bad. She was installed as a member of his family, and that was

better than to depend entirely on the cousinship to the Mexican Doña Maria. She was really a little afraid of the swarthy black-browed women of the country. To be sure, they sat around in fat content, with their bits of embroidery or drawn work, and seemed to see nothing else; but she had seen Doña Maria whip an Indian servant with her own hands one day, and the blind rage in the dark face had ever after made Angela a trifle more respectful. It was not nice to be entirely at the mercy of ignorant power. Don Eduardo was always ready with gold pieces for a pretty woman, but even the distant cousinhood might not be all the protection required for a lady of Angela's beauty, if any animosity should ever take root in Doña Maria's mind.

So it was all well as things stood. Keith Bryton would, she knew, keep to both letter and spirit of any promise he had made poor Teddy, and she felt sure the fond boy had exacted much of the brother who he thought could accomplish all things.

Thus she decided, as she watched and weighed his apparent amused indifference to the admiration she excited. Fair women were at a premium in the City of the Angels. He had just arrived from the dusky tribes of Mexico; before that he had ranged the desert land; but she realized with resentment that no

beauty of hers would ever make an oasis for him. The men who did admire her he regarded as fools.

He saw her glance from him, and she set her white teeth together with a little click of absolute frustration. She had accepted his ungracious invitation in order to show him the admiration her mere appearance on the drive would excite, and it all weighed not an iota. Would he ever really care for any one? Had he ever cared?

Then he moved his hand, and the sun gleamed on the ring he wore, the Mexican onyx with the Aztec eagle. It recalled the adventure over which she had laughed at the Mission. She had never believed Teddy when he declared that Keith's attraction for that queer Mexican nun was a serious fact. Teddy knew so little, so very little, of the real feelings of either men or women. He had gone to his death buoyed for any sort of adventure by the absolute conviction that his wife adored him. Poor Teddy! Never would any woman be able to fool Keith Bryton like that,— not even the woman he would care for, if she ever did appear.

While she thought so, and watched him, his face grew suddenly rigid and colorless. The carriage of the bishop came down the street, the palomentos with their golden coats and silver manes and tails shining

like satin in the sunlight. Rafael sat with his back to the horses, looking very much bored indeed, but beside the bishop sat the woman who had faced her on the hill of San Juan, and who had held her horse in the middle of the road.

She was prepared for the sudden light of appreciation in Rafael's beautiful eyes, as he lifted his hat and let his glance linger and meet hers for one swift instant of comprehension, but she was not prepared for the sudden leaning forward of his dark-browed bride, and the quick look with which she took in the two women in the carriage, and then the colorless face of their escort.

He looked at her levelly as he lifted his hat in acknowledgment of her husband's salutation. If his glance held ever so slight a suggestion of warning, it was unheeded by her. Her dark eyes glowed, her red lips parted and lost their color as she rested one slender jewelled hand on the carriage frame, and stared at him with incredulous eyes; one could see that she did not even breathe as the carriages whirled past each other; at least Angela noted it.

By turning her head she saw Rafael put out his hand suddenly to his wife, who had sunk back on the cushions beside the bishop. His manner suggested that he thought her ill. Keith could see the same

without turning his head. But even after he observed the lace-draped shoulders straighten themselves, and the head held again proudly erect under the mantilla, he continued to gaze after them, unconscious that the blue eyes opposite him were alive with curiosity.

"One would think you were a long-lost brother, from the way that woman stared," she remarked. "One would think she would show more restraint when riding in state beside the bishop, and with her husband opposite."

Keith recovered himself and turned his attention to her.

"Was that Rafael Arteaga's wife?" he asked, carelessly. "I supposed it was, but have not had the honor of being presented."

"Well, they told me she would not notice heretics, but one heretic was the only person she noticed in this carriage. How she looked at you! I told you she had nasty staring eyes, like augers boring through one. Did you see, Doña Maria? Did you not fear she would disgrace us all by leaping into the carriage?"

Doña Maria's black, bead-like eyes were regarding the young man curiously.

"It may be a custom of Mexico for ladies to show attention to strange men in that way," she observed, guardedly. "It may be so. I had never heard of it.

The new lady of the Mission is teaching San Juan many new things, but I do not think she will teach it that sort of manners. They do not compare well with the American ladies' manners—no?"

"I fancy it was only as your escort she was gracious enough to turn and look at me; she might have fancied I was known to her. She looks very young."

"You would forget she was young if you heard her talk to the padre," returned Doña Maria, significantly. "It was enough to bring a malediction on all our heads to listen to it!"

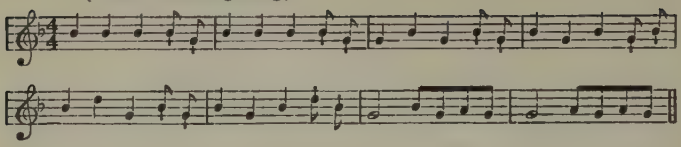
"The bishop has forgiven her; at least it looks so."

"Oh, she is clever! He thinks she is a saint, this bishop. But the padre knows!"

She did not add, "and I know," but her thin cold lips with their satisfied smile suggested as much, and Bryton, observing it, felt anew that the girl from Mexico had a strong team to fight in Doña Maria and the padre.

The Magpie's Reveille

(Indian Gambling Song)



"A'a'a'i-ne! A'a'a'i-ne!
Ta'a'-ni-aine! Ta'a'-ni-aine!
Bita alkaigi dike yiska ne.
Gayelka'! Gayelka'!"

TRANSLATION.

The magpie, the magpie, here underneath,
In the white of his wings are the footsteps of the morning.
It dawns! It dawns!

CHAPTER IX

WHEN the night was old, and others slept, Raquel Arteaga crept in silence to the bedside of the old Indian woman of the hill tribe who had been her nurse, who was still her maid, and who was the one link she kept near her of the old life.

"Tia Polonia, awake!" she said, briefly; and as the woman did so, frightened and full of questions, her mistress held up her hand and rested herself on the side of the pallet, regarding the dark old face with doubt.

"Thy husband, beloved,—he has—"

"It is not my husband this time, Polonia. He is quite safe at the gaming-table, and will come in at sunrise with empty pockets. It is not my husband. It is—" She paused a long time, scrutinizing every feature of the old woman, who grew gray of visage under those smouldering eyes, and her hands shook.

"Darling, little one, thou art so like thy mother; more than ever when angry, and it is night; and I—Holy God! It is like a ghost comes to my bed to—to—ah, Doña Espiritu—mia!—what is the anger in thine eyes?"

"Can a dead woman be angry?" demanded her mistress drearily, the beautiful curved mouth quivering for an instant. "And it is a dead woman they have made of me—all of you! You lied to me, Polonia, when you brought word to me he had died there in Mexico!"

The old woman covered her face with her hands, and sank back whimpering on the pallet.

"I trusted you, and you lied to me, all of you!" the girl repeated in a hopeless tone of finality. "All these months he has been alive, and I have not known. You liars—liars—liars accursed!"

The old woman uttered a smothered shriek, and buried her face in the blankets.

"Not the curse, beloved, not the curse!" she begged, tremulously, "the curse of your people. It means—it means— Ai! not the curse, little one! Thou hast only meant to frighten me to tell you how it was, and I will—I will! Only, child of the spirits, Doña Espiritu, bring not the curse!"

She cowered and mumbled in a sort of palsied

"You Lied to Me—All of You!"

fear, but the girl sat there untouched by her misery, looking at her drearily. Perhaps she had some slight hope of denial, but Polonia's gray face put that out of her reach.

"Sit up," she commanded, and the old woman hastily scrambled into a sitting posture, but with her hands over her eyes, her body still rocking with fear. "Why did you do it?"

Never before had Tia Polonia heard those hard cold tones from her "querida"—her little one—her nursling of other days. This girl sitting there erect in the glimmering light of the candle was really Doña Espiritu of the tribe of the kings.

"Excellencia," she muttered, "it is true; I did sin. But the padre gave me the word. He said your soul was lost; that the man had bewitched you as—as your little mother had been bewitched when she—when she left religion for your father, and in the end they both died—and so soon!—and—and I wanted you to live, Excellencia! and I wanted your soul to live; and—so it was I took the word of the padre to you, and told you he was dead—and wished that he was dead—but it was all no use at all! On his hand when the fever burned was your ring—it kept him alive and he could not die, and all day and all night he said, 'Doña Espiritu! Doña Espiritu!' The padre heard,

and I heard. The American brother, he heard too, and asked the Indios who was Doña Espiritu, and where did she live, that he might send for her. But it was no use. The padre made them all afraid for your soul, so that I told you the lie. Now it is all said, and my life is going out of my body at the curse of your anger."

In fact, the fear in the old creature had worked on her own nerves, so that her final words were very faint. She spoke as one half swooning, and put out her hand in pitiful plea for help.

"Ah — the good padre," said the girl, bitterly. "Well, you see how it has all ended. The padre died, and has gone to God to answer for the lie; and the man he wished dead is alive — alive — alive, and oh — Mother of God! is happy with — with —"

Her cold self-control melted in a flood of tears, and she flung herself face down on the pallet beside the frightened Indian woman, her form shaken with shuddering sobs of absolute despair.

The dawn was near. All the night she had walked in her room alone, stunned and wordless over this thing she could not fight, or reason, or pray away; and now, having heard it all,—even of his calls for her when unconscious,—she had let fall for the first time the cold mask she had worn since the death

of Doña Luisa, and since the significance of her vow had been revealed to her by the days and nights of Rafael's life.

She wept in a wild abandonment of grief at the hopeless vista of years reaching on to the edge of the world where death is. It had all been dreary enough before; but now—

When the birds began their welcome of the day she was still lying prone, but silent. The tempest of feeling had passed, and her Indian woman stroked her hair softly, and waited, and did not speak. At last she rose, and looked out on the yellowing light touching the purple of the mountains.

"This is only a dream of the night, Polonia," she said, with a great sigh; "sleep again, and forget it all."

But the old woman clung with trembling hands to the folds of the girl's gown, and rested her cheek on the silken slippers.

"And the curse, darling? what of the curse of the lie?"

"Curses come home to the people who utter them," said the girl, drearily. "On my head they all lie—the curse by which I was made blind for a little, little while of life, and which now allows me to see when it is too late. The curse of God has followed our people; no blessing of the Church can wipe it out."

"But I — I — beloved?"

"The sin that is for love is not so black a sin, and it was your love the padre trusted to — your fear that I was bewitched and lost. But it is all over; we are in a new land, and this is a new life."

"And — he is happy — without thee?"

"I have seen his wife; people call her beautiful. I saw him almost touching her, yet I did not scream."

"Mother of God! his wife!"

"I heard her name, — it was enough. His I did not need to ask; I remembered."

"But — dear one — it is better that he is married. Pardon, beloved — I am at thy feet, and I feel thy heartache. But, after all, is it not to thank the saints that he is married?"

"Perhaps. Otherwise, he might say to me some day, 'Come!' And the witchcraft of the ring might hold, and —"

"Holy Mother! and then —"

"And I — God knows what I might do, Polonia."

And then the old Indian woman was left alone, mumbling prayers and crossing herself.

Later she got up and went to the priest of Our Lady of the Angels and brought a bottle of holy water to sprinkle on the threshold of the street door, and all sides of Doña Raquel's room, that no curse

of witchcraft or bad dream of the night might have power over the days.

It was broad daylight when Rafael came home whistling gayly a dance of melody. He had been gifted with unusual good luck, and his pockets were full of gold pieces. He threw a buckskin sack of coin on his wife's bed before he noticed that she was not lying there.

"Hola! Raquelita mia! There is plenty to pay for masses; your priests always want money for that sort of thing. Since you look after my soul, I pay for the prayers when I have good luck."

Raquel arose from where she knelt at the little altar in the corner.

"Oh, is that where you are? What need to pay the priests when you do enough praying for an army?"

She smiled absently, but did not speak. He stood watching her as she brushed her mass of dark, slightly waving hair.

"Let your woman do that," he said at last, with perfunctory solicitude. "It tires your arm, and I don't want you tired to-day. There is a picnic, and we should go."

"Which of our friends make it?"

"It is Doña Maria Downing, who, as our one

neighbor down the country, wants to add to the entertainment Los Angeles gives you. It is to make peace with the bishop, I think; at least, so it looks. He is invited. You can help them to be friends. Is that not the duty of us both as good Catholics?"

She halted in her task and looked at him quietly. He was plainly set on being very agreeable, for some reason; too seldom had he mentioned their faith but to scoff at the rigid rules of his mother and his wife.

"You want it very much," she said; "but why? You do not care at all for Doña Maria's personal peace with the bishop. That can be arranged without a picnic to the hills. It only needs that they give back, of their own free will, that which belongs to the Church, and make a confession that it was wrongly held."

"If you would only talk to her of this graciously, instead of demanding it," persisted Rafael, gently, "much could be effected. Doña Angela thinks for certain—"

"Doña Angela?"

"Oh, I mean her — the relative who is with her now — the Mrs. Bryton who drove with her yesterday. The bishop asked who she was — you remember?"

"I remember," she said, quietly, though a little

shudder touched her. "But I am tired of this town, Rafael. I meant to tell you so this morning. I want to ride home to-day. Doña Maria's merry-makings do not attract me. Our business here is over; let us go."

"Holy God! but you are a wife for a man!" he cried in sudden fury. "I weigh you down with jewels and silks and laces, and you would bury them all with yourself in that old rat-hole of a Mission. I wish to God the padre and Doña Maria had blown down every brick of it before you saw the accursed place!"

"Accursed? The Church of God? Rafael!"

"Ay, accursed, since you will know!" he repeated. "Every old Indian of San Juan can tell you that."

"Some Indian, perhaps, who has had to be whipped by the padres," she remarked, with quiet scorn.

"You don't believe me?" he cried. "Well, you shall! Sit down — sit down and listen for once, and you will be glad to keep out of the curse-haunted place."

She regarded him with a little tolerant smile, and drew a serape of blue around her, and curled herself on the foot of the bed and waited.

"It is early for stories," she observed; "but since it is your pleasure — "

"Not any pleasure has any of it been to me from first to last," he retorted, "nor any pleasure will it be to whoever holds it! You think you are strong, your saints will help you! But no saint ever put on an altar — not even that of the Virgin herself — can take off the curse from San Juan till the altar is bathed in human blood, as the tiles of the floor have been bathed — that is the curse of Sahirit."

She stared at him with wide eyes and blanching face.

"Until the altar is bathed in human blood, as the tiles of the floor have been," she whispered. "Rafael! That — that is of a religion older than the life of Christianity in Mexico. God of Gods! Does it follow me here?"

"Follow *you!*" and he laughed contemptuously; "it is a story older than our grandfathers. Only the old Indians whisper it now each time ill luck comes to any of us — and I've had enough! When they picked up Miguel tramped into the earth by the cattle, only the white men would help — no Indian; they knew it was the curse coming true."

"Tell me," she said, briefly. Her lips were white, and she shuddered with cold, and drew the serape close.

"You'd rather hear some old Indian tell it," he

answered; "they make one chill when they count on their fingers and toes the things the curse has brought. We had a curse of our own in the Arteaga family: my mother was always in prayer because of that; she never knew that Miguel had bought an interest in another."

"Go on — tell me! How comes the rule of the Aztec altar to this Christian temple?"

"Aztec? I did not say Aztec. I know nothing of their mummeries. But it can't be that—there have been no Aztecs since the time of Cortez and the priests."

"I — I have heard there is one hill tribe still refusing the saints, and giving the sun worship," she said, slowly. "But go on; tell me!"

"Sun-worship! yes, that's the thing!" he cried. "A man, who was a heretic of Mexico and a great builder of stone, killed a priest and a woman down there. Some say the woman was his wife. He was to have his head cut off for it, but word went down from here that such a man was needed by the priests of San Juan; they wished to build a stone church instead of adobe brick, as all the others were, if only a master mason could be sent to them. They had soldiers to guard him, even if the man chanced to be a convict, as many of the guards had been, and they

got the viceroy to help; and in the end the heretic who had killed a priest was sent to San Juan. The old Indios say he looked as big as two men, and he worked as he pleased. When the padres interfered he sat down and looked at the piles of stone and did nothing, and nothing could move him. They could have shot and buried him, but that would not build their church, which was to be the finest in the Californias. So they had to let him alone, and he built it as pleased himself. Their ground plan only he accepted. It was like a cross, as you see it now, but on no other part of the church was any symbol of Christianity — only stars and other things which some say are flowers and some say are suns and moons, and on the corner-stone and key-stone of the high altar is carved a thing no Christian can read, not even the padres — and somewhere in those symbols is held the curse."

"Who says? Did he?"

"He? No; he died laughing, and refused the blessing of the priest. One thing only he said when he read the words on the oldest bell, as he built a place in the tower for it. The name of the maker is on the bell; you can see it yet; it is Ruelas. 'So Ruelas made you — iron-tongue,' a soldier heard him say, 'and your name is San Juan. Well, Señor

"Rũelas me fecit.
Me Llama San Juan. 1796."

Ruelas, you only have your name in this work. The good padres will see that my name is forgotten, but instead of a name, I will leave myself, and so long as stone stands on stone I will call louder and farther than your iron tongue when rung your loudest! When the storms of centuries shall beat out every star and moon and sun in the stone of the temple, the man from Culiacan will be remembered here in Sahirit.'"

"Sahirit?"

"The Indian name for the valley was 'Quanis Savit Sahirit'; you can see it on the church records."

"And it means?"

"No one knows, and no one cares; it may mean another curse, for all I know. The Indios either do not know or will not tell."

"But—" and she drew in a long breath of relief—"what the man from Culiacan said to the bell—the thing the soldier heard—was not a curse; it was only that the beautiful work should be remembered."

"Oh, yes, that! But there was a prophecy years before, when the corner-stone was set in its place and blessed by the padres, and the Indios were all there on their knees saying a rosary, and the viceroy and all the dignitaries. An Indian hunter was also there from the south, and he was a stranger. He

looked at the thing carved on the corner-stone, and he looked at the builder, who leaned against the wall and laughed when the holy water touched it; and the stranger crossed himself, for his mother was a convert; but to the captain of the guard he said the thing I told you, and the captain of the guard was of my father's family. So it was repeated down to our time."

"But the words — he said what of a prophecy?"

"He said human blood, and not holy water, must baptize the stones and the altar of a temple with those signs. He was afraid the padre would put malediction on him if he told him that the blessing of a Christian saint was not so strong as the gods of the Indians, but he would not stand or kneel beside the lines where the church was to be, and he would not tell why he was afraid. He said he did not know what would happen there: it might be a tidal wave from the sea in sight, or it might be a pestilence, for the people were very wicked and very dirty, but it was marked with a sign for evil, and it would be well if the walls never went higher."

"Well?"

"They tried to get him to tell the padre, so that the builder might be whipped, but the stranger Indian was afraid. He said he wanted to live to see his children again, and they lived south in the hill country;

and he ran away when they tried to keep him, but he had warned some old Indios, and when the first earthquake cracked the walls, they all remembered."

"And—?"

"The mason laughed, but mended the cracked walls and went on at work, always singing, always working, even before sunrise. The old Indios who helped said it was at sunrise hour only that he worked on the keystones with the suns and star things, but they maybe lied. And after the dedication of the church he died as he lived, laughing and a heretic; and when the earthquake came and the tower of the bells fell, and the tiles of the floor were wet with the blood of the thirty-nine lives crushed out there, then the old Indios whispered and remembered many things; for the prophecy of the strange learned Indian of the south had come true."

"And—the altar? Did—some one—"

Her lips were stiff as with cold, and she could scarcely articulate.

"Holy God! how white you are, Raquel!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were not a coward like the other women. Take this wine—take it! Por Dios, but you gave me a fright!"

She swallowed the wine, and smiled absently at his excitement, and drew the serape closer. She did not

speak again for a long time, just sat staring out toward the blue of the hills.

"Are you in a trance?" he demanded. "Santa Maria, but you are a wife to come home to! If I interest you at all, I have to talk to you of things bad enough to scare the devil. Now you see why Doña Maria blows down the walls—they were accursed from the beginning. She thinks maybe she is doing a pious thing, who knows?"

"Selling to others the stone that is accursed?"

"Oh, that is a side issue. But I think truly, Raquelita, she is afraid of the bishop now, since you have come. I even think she wants to be friends; Doña Angela told me. She has promised that she will build a chapel there of adobe, if the bishop will give his benediction. Much of bad luck is coming to them, and she is growing afraid."

"Yes; she has no sense of justice in her; she has only fear," returned Raquel. "Let her build chapels if she likes, but the blessing of God was put on those stone walls, as well as the curse of a heretic, and what she has done is sacrilege. I will do nothing to countenance it, or allow it to continue."

"But, at least, you will do one thing," he said, emphatically. "You have heard enough of the curse to show you why it is no place for human beings to

live. Only half the curse is carried out. The tiles have been baptized by human blood—but not the altar. You will stay here with live people, and let the old ruin wait alone for the curse to be lifted."

"I will go back," she said, with sudden decision, dropping the serape from around her shoulders and beginning to braid her hair. "No, you need not swear like that, Rafael; God would shut His ears if He heard you. You have told me a fine story of fear, and some of it may be true, but our duty lies there. We may lift the curse; we can go back and try."

Her husband sprang to his feet and flung his chair crashing into the low window opening on a veranda. The shattered glass fell in a glittering heap, but the noise of it did not drown his oaths.

"It is no use at all to break the windows of our friends, Rafael," observed his wife; "and neither the saints nor Our Lady the Virgin will allow such curses as yours to be heard. There are dangers here for—for both of us, perhaps,—dangers more to be afraid of than the walls of the good padres. I ride back to-day."

"You think of it as all past, that curse?" he demanded, threateningly. "Well, you think so! Priests have gone mad there, though the Church keeps it quiet. Since the year Don Eduardo and Doña Maria

bought it, what has happened? All their land is slipping away. To-day she is building an adobe on the old Mission ranch, to hold one hundred and sixty acres in case they lose all the rest of their thirty miles of ranches. Two of her sons have been killed in the streets—one by a woman. All that remains is slipping slowly through their fingers. It is like a handful of wheat: the closer they try to hold it, the less they have in their hands. All they try is of no use. When they first bought those old walls of the Mission at Pico's auction, they were masters of the land, but what of that?"

"If it is a curse, they earned it by tearing down the temple consecrated to God, that is all!"

"All? Miguel, my brother, blew down no walls; he did no harm to anything at all. He only bought an interest in the Mission lands, and claimed some living-rooms as his share, and he is struck like the others by the curse, and does not die in his bed either, but is trampled into the earth until no one can see him!"

"But that may be the other curse working—the curse on the Arteagas. You people seem to have earned a great many! Is it not time some of the family should try to live for blessings?"

He did not answer, only stared at her with angry eyes and lips twitching in wrath he could not express.

She looked at him an instant, and stretched out her arms wearily. All the glorious world of love about them, yet never aught of harmony in their two lives linked together. She had never seen the life domestic of young people. She did not know what it might mean to other women, but there were days when she grew sick with the dread of future years, the endless prison of her vow, the—

Suddenly she turned to him with a little gesture of appeal, almost tremulous. It was such weary work to battle constantly; and his mother—

"Rafael," she said, gently, "the blessings are in the world somewhere—shall not we try to find them? The old lives of the maledictions are gone. Ours is the new life, and we have done no wrong to expiate. And it may be, if we live as—as your mother would have wanted us to live, that the saints—"

"To the bottom of the sea with your saints!" he broke in, angrily. "Por Dios! you are always dragging the dead out of their graves to make the days like a funeral. I prefer most the picnic in the hills, and I go to-day."

"So do I," she answered; "but it will be to the hills of the south by the sea. To-night the moon shines, and the ride will be better than a picnic of your political friends."

"By—"

"It is no sort of use for you to make empty oaths, Rafael. I leave this town to-day; with you if you are wise, without you if you are not. But I myself —I go!"

He went out and slammed the door, and directly she heard him tell Juan Castillas that he had married one of the wooden saints of the Mission come to life.

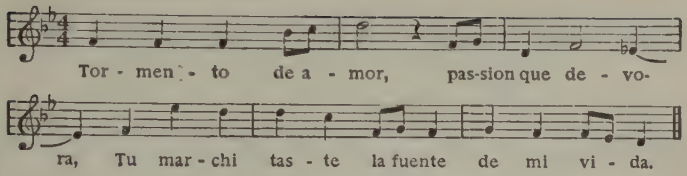
"I am glad it is not one with the broken glass eyes and the missing fingers," laughed Juan. "Doña Raquel is the most beautiful woman in the Californias to-day."

She turned from the window and looked at herself in the mirror. The most beautiful woman in the Californias! Was that so? Could it be? Yet what was beauty, after all, if—

Between herself and the glass another face seemed to arise,—the blue-eyed childish face for which she had been forgotten.

"Holy Mother!" she moaned, and covered her own with her hands. "Of what use is beauty to a woman who is not beloved?"

El Tormento de Amor.



CHAPTER X

"I WASTED the holy water on the doorway of the sala and the bedroom," grumbled old Polonia, ensconced among the serapes on the carreta; "I should have kept it for the road to the sea. She rides away from him alone; but it is a witchcraft, all the same."

Secretly the old woman gave sympathy to the handsome Rafael, who loved women of gaiety and fine clothes. The town was a very good place to stay, and the band played, and there was a good circus; and to choose instead a nasty old Mission where a cross priest scolded, and smoked, and drank himself stupid each dinner-time! What kind of a girl would go back there?

Still, the old Indian knew that she was not of wood, like the statues in the old church, let the husband think as he might! Last night had proven she could be her mother's own child in a storm of passion. It was perhaps for the best that she did not love her husband so madly; for if he should ever prove untrue,—and men of course were so—what might not happen?

She thought of the witchcraft of the mother, and crossed herself.

The moon, the beautiful moon of the month of Mary! shone round and silvered in the blue above the mountains, as the blaze of the sun sank into the western sea. South lay the ranch of San Joaquin, and Raquel, for all her thirty-mile ride, was sorry. She would have no excuse to ride past; it was the one slight of the country to pass the house of an acquaintance, and this family was one deserving of honor. The soft dusk of warm lands had stretched over the level. The sweet clover along the road had a deeper note of perfume, and the patches of mustard bloom added its own spicy fragrance. Gladly she would have ridden on alone in the perfect night, but it would not do. She cared little for the herd of people, but she always tried to keep in mind what the Doña Luisa would have done in the little duties

toward the opinion of the valley, and she had no idea of making a scandal, or of appearing to ride in secret from the town where her husband was still detained.

So, when the dogs barked, she galloped forward to the ranch-house, and was met with excited welcome from the mistress and her two vivacious daughters and their cousin Ana Mendez. All the news of the town they asked for. They had heard wonderful things of the courtesy shown her by the new bishop, who was not given to showing much pronounced attention to even the devout of the faith. They had rejoiced each day to hear of the honors showered on her by the families of the city. It was as if a queen had arrived in their valley—and to leave it all and ride alone in the night!

Ana cut their queries short and bade them see to old Polonia, that she might be fed and rested well, and the driver also, and then carried her guest to her own room, where she put her hands on Raquel's shoulders and looked into her eyes, and then without a word led her to the shrine in the corner, where they both knelt.

When the prayer was over and she had seen her guest supplied with bread, and red wine, and olives, and sliced beef, she regarded her sadly a moment, noting that only the wine was swallowed, and that the girl looked pale in the candle-light.

"Poor little dear," she said, softly, and patted her shoulder and spoke with the tenderness of intimacy. "I think now thou wert only a child that morning in the wedding-veil, when she gave thee that vow and died. Thou hast such strength in looks, my Raquelita, no one remembers how young in life thou art. But I see now how it is. Rafael is the son of my mother's cousin, and I know that blood! You but give the word, and my uncle shall ride to Los Angeles in the morning and say what is right to be said to Rafael. We know those boys — Miguel too," and she crossed herself. "My uncle always look himself to the door-key when that Miguel Arteaga come with a serenade. Oh, we know those boys in this valley better than their mother, who thought to guard Rafael from the heretics. Holy Mary! No heretic in the land lived worse than the life on Miguel Arteaga's ranches!"

"That does not make any difference at all," said the girl, wearily. "I took the vow, '*So long as we both shall live.*' That seems a long time, my dear Ana, but I must have not one other thought in this life."

"And he sends thee home?"

"No; this is not his fault — do not think it," and she evaded the eyes of Ana. "He will follow, now that I have come; I am most certain of that; but

he was in a rage, of course, and if I would live there in the town he would do anything to please me, almost. But I feel weak some days. I — I am not strong enough to fight the people there whom his mother was afraid of. In my own house they will not come. In my own valley I may keep my promise."

"Poor little dear," moaned Ana again. It was a good hope, and the girl did not seem to have much else to live for; but Ana had known the Arteaga men for many years, and had her doubts.

"It is time that Rafael were at home," she conceded. "Juan Flores is around the range again; some say El Capitan is with him, and they are on this side. Last night they had supper at Trabuco ranch; they did no harm there, but that does not mean that he will do no harm elsewhere. Avila let him have horses once when the marshal was close behind; since that time Avila's house is safe, and his herds as well."

"And Capitan?"

"Oh!" Ana's tone was carefully careless. "No one seems certain he is along. He does not so often come this way; for a year he has been somewhere in Sonora — only when the horses are picked for the government, or the Arteagas have a fine lot broken,

does he cross to this country. There is where Rafael needs guarding more than from heretics."

"From Capitan? He — he — would not kill —"

"No," said Ana, slowly; "I never think he wants Rafael to die; he only wants him not to be happy; always he wants Rafael to remember he is not so far away but he can do him harm. Rafael hates the lonely Mission valley on account of that. In a town Capitan never can make him afraid so much."

"Rafael is not a coward, I think," returned Raquel.

"No, but he knows Capitan does not forget — there was a girl between them once. Rafael is the handsomer, so he got her. Oh, that is long ago. But Rafael was foolish and laughed too loud, and so he has to pay!"

"But I think that is a mistake. I heard all about the trouble; his mother told me. Capitan fights the government only, and takes horses from the Arteagas because they go with the Americanos as friends; that is all. We heard it all at San Luis Rey as we drove north — you remember?"

"Oh, yes, I am not forgetting that," and Ana laughed. "I listen all the time to what his mother thinks she knows about that; and it is true, too, but not all the truth. I could tell you —"

She stopped suddenly, not certain it was wise to

tell the girl the thing causing her amusement, for, after all, it was not really funny; it was serious enough in itself, it might frighten the girl very much. No other in her place would live one hour in the valley, or ride at night with only one man and an old Indian woman as guard.

"If you know that I have been told lies, you had better tell me the truth," said Raquel. "It may cost me more to find it out alone than to hear it from a friend."

"That is true," agreed Ana, after a moment of thought. She went to the door and looked in the outer room to be sure no curious ears were there. She could hear ecstatic cries from the girls, who were giving old Polonia good things to eat, and plying her with endless questions. She was recounting the brilliant worldly scenes her old eyes had lately witnessed, and pitying herself a little that she could not remain; for each day had been finer than the day before. And the horse-races, and the fine cavaliers, and Doña Raquel always in the finest carriage — Holy Mary! but it was a thing to see!

Ana closed the door tightly and came back and sat down beside Raquel and took her hand.

"My aunt and the girls are over their heads in delight out there," she remarked, dryly; "and I will tell

you a thing no one has been told concerning that ride from San Luis Rey. Rafael lost some fine horses that night — do you remember?"

Raquel did not; she might have heard — but Doña Luisa's death, all that sorrow, all the many and quick changes, had blotted out the fainter records of that day.

"Well, when we stopped for coffee at the camp the cook told us; you may not have heard. However, they were taken after you went into the river. You have not forgotten that?"

"How could I? Oh, yes, I remember! The priest told me that night. How strange it should have all been crowded out of my mind! He told me to give Rafael a message of warning. What was it? What was it?"

She clasped her hands over her brows and tried to remember. Her first meeting with Rafael beside the dead body of his mother had driven out of her mind the message she was to have delivered. It was a warning, a warning of some sort; that much she was sure of, and — what was it about her father — her father's name?

"I think," said Ana, speaking softly and watching her, "that he told you Felipe Estevan's daughter had saved Rafael Arteaga a treasure that night."

"Anita! So he did; and you know the words, the very words he spoke to me!"

"I know more, Raquel mia; I know what the treasure was."

"And—?"

"It is not nice to tell," and Ana hesitated. "But he saw you there that evening with his own eyes."

"The priest?"

"Yes, the priest. He saved you from being carried to the hills by the Juan Flores robbers, while Capitan took others of the men and secured the chests of wedding gifts from the old Mission. Oh, it was all planned for the one big revenge on Rafael Arteaga. But he saw you, and so—"

"And that priest saved me from them, Anita?"

"Yes, he saved you—the priest—and sent you back to your friends, and sent the men across the mesas—because you were Estevan's daughter. But he did not try to save Rafael's horses; that night many of the finest were headed eastward and never came back."

"And if—if the padre had not been there at the right moment, I—"

"It is not a nice story, at all," acknowledged Ana. "They are rough men. One of them would have married you, and you would never have cared to see your friends again, and Rafael never would have found you."

"Mother of God! He hates Rafael like that, yet lets him live?"

Ana laughed a little and shrugged her shoulders.

"Capitan is like that," she observed. "No one is like him. If Rafael's life were in danger this hour, Capitan would ride to save him. Oh, he does not mean that he shall die while young, and handsome, and rich, and beloved!"

Her tone had a little hard ring for a moment; her eyes were sparkling with a certain admiration for the character she was describing. The story had brought the color back to Raquel's face, and she listened feverishly. What strange, strange things could be possible in the smiling valleys of San Juan! For the moment she forgot the dull ache in her heart which had driven her to ride alone back to sanctuary.

"And you know all this, Anita; even the words of the padre! How?"

She caught Ana's hands in hers impetuously, and made her look in her eyes.

"He told me," said her friend, simply.

"Then you know him? You see him sometimes?"

"Sometimes."

"And he is called—?"

"Libertad."

"Padre Libertad—the Liberated? I never have

heard him spoken of. Where can I find him? Anita, I will go alone, but this feud shall be ended. He will help me. And I — I never knew what he saved me from that night. I scarcely thanked him. He was so strange, so abrupt, so masterful, I accepted all he did, and never knew! Tell me. Anita. I will go to him — I will —"

"No one goes to him," said Ana. "He never stays in one place. If you see him, you see him — but —"

"But he comes to San Juan?"

"Oh, yes, he comes to San Juan once a year at least, so they will not forget him."

Ana's lips curled in a little smile, quickly suppressed.

"But, Anita, that he tells you all these things, so that you know the reasons of Capitan —"

"Oh, Capitan is a sort of cousin of our family. Even when he is outcast, I do not want him to lose his soul; so I — my people do not know — but always I pay for a mass when I hear that the robbers have killed a man. I never think that Capitan would like to kill; still, it might happen. So I remember — as I remembered him when I was a little girl, and when I was married — and I pay for a mass, that is all."

"I am glad to-night, very glad you tell me all this, Anita. Not glad that it is so, but, thanks to God, it is something to do — to do — to do!"

"And what?" asked Ana, regarding her curiously. Heretofore the wife of Rafael had appeared to her self-restrained and cold, but to-night—

Raquel caught her hand and pressed it, and laughed.

"You are saving me to-night, Anita, and you do not know it," she said, with feverish intensity. "I was unhappy when I rode to your door; so tired of all the world that I could think of nothing sweeter than to ride on and on to the sea, and into it, and go to sleep there."

"Raquel! That is a mortal sin!"

"So it is, but I shall do penance, and when the padre comes again, O my dear Ana, you alone will not pay for the masses; we can do many things for good together, you and I. You must come to me to the Mission; you must! I have had many things to fight alone, Anita, and I never can tell you what they are. But this new thing we can fight together, darling—you for your relation and I for my husband and my promise; and, the saints helping us, we shall win, Anita, and it will all come right; and thanks to God I came to you this night!"

Her eyes were alight with excitement, her cheeks flushed and burning. Once or twice she shivered slightly; and Ana, who had been reassured by the beautiful color so quickly replacing the pallor of the cheeks, grew all at once apprehensive, as she noticed

that the hands of Raquel were very cold indeed, and that her laugh was nervous, and that her teeth chattered, and that the words she tried to utter grew indistinct.

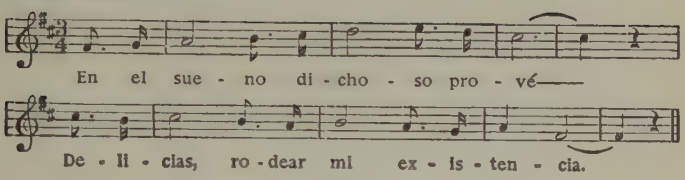
"Holy Mary! I have given her a fever," gasped Ana. "That my tongue had been blistered, before I babbled all that to her! Raquel, for the love of God don't shake like that, and don't laugh at me! Stop it! The laugh is the worst of all! Raquel — Raquelita — darling mine!"

But Ana's frenzy of fear was so irresistibly funny, that Raquel continued to laugh, and the laughter grew louder after the other women were called in, and helped to undress her and wrap her in blankets to smother the chill. That night, candles never went out in the house, and Ana knelt before the altar with prayers to the saints that they might undo the folly of her tongue. But old Polonia knelt instead by the couch of Raquel and cursed the American, that he had not died there in Mexico.

In the early dawn Polonia crept unseen to the aquia, and of soft clay made an image of him, and thrust pins through every vital portion of it, that there might be no chance left of life in the man it represented; then, having finished her work, she left it where the sun would dry it, and crept back to the room and curled up on a rug, and slept the sleep of the content.

The good holy water she had paid money for had failed. But there are always two ways. If the saints refuse to help, there is always the devil left. If the padres did not get more effective holy water, whose fault was it that poor souls had to seek help elsewhere? She would do penance, of course, after the man died, and perhaps pay for a mass, and that would make it all right for everybody, and was so easy! She went to sleep wondering if he would die from a slow lingering disease, or how it would be. It was inconvenient that one was not allowed to select the very way the end must come. But the devil would know what she would like best,—that the foot of his horse might go down in a gopher-hole and pitch him on his head just so that the neck would break, quick, like the snapping of a finger. And no one would ever guess how it had been brought about!

El Sueño



CHAPTER XI

TEA made of Castillian rose petals, and all the other little helps of the herb family, were brewed and steamed in the kitchen of the ranch for the saving of Raquel from the grasp of a strength-sapping fever.

Conscience-stricken, Ana fought and argued against sending for Rafael. Every hour of the day and night she was willing to watch and work, if only Raquel's illness might pass without the cause of it being known; and she was certain that the cause was the shock of learning how narrowly she had escaped kidnapping at the hands of Rafael's enemy.

Sometimes, indeed, Raquel did murmur in her sleep of "Padre Libertad" and the water surging over her head; and then again it was "the altar — the altar —

and the blood on the tiles of the temple"; then "the ring — the ring — the ring." Sometimes she would moan that the beautiful one with the happiness must not receive the ring — never the ring of Aztec witchery! Then her words would trail along in inarticulate whispers, and sink into brief periods of slumber.

Old Polonia, listening and watching, heard all. Of Padre Libertad and the dream of the water she cared not anything. Of the ring she understood, and was afraid lest a name be uttered. But when the girl moaned of the blood on the altar and on the floor of the temple, the old creature dropped in a cowering heap and screamed with fear, and begged with tears that the husband would come, and that a padre must come, for it was all of no use to do any more of anything; and that the mother of Doña Raquel had come from — from death, to tell of hidden things to her daughter, and it meant that death was in the home with them, and that Doña Raquel would never again sing with the birds, or gallop across the mesas!

Ana, trembling with fright and this assurance, almost smothered old Polonia, that the others might not hear the wild prophecy, but without further delay she sent a letter to Rafael, and the man who bore it was to spare neither horses nor himself on the errand.

The man rode well, and made only one halt to

change a horse at a ranch. The sheriff of Los Angeles County, and many owners of ranches, were there. The sheriff looked at the rider and his reeking horse carefully.

"From where do you come?" he asked, and the man jerked his thumb toward the south.

"San Joaquin."

"What's up there?"

"Not anything, señor."

It never entered his head that a woman sick at the San Joaquin ranch would have interest for a party of horsemen who looked as if out for a hunt. But the party exchanged glances. One of them, a farmer who knew him, stepped forward.

"Where do you ride in such haste, if nothing is up?" he asked.

"I take a letter to Don Rafael; his wife is sick."

"Where?"

"At San Joaquin ranch, señor. Adios!"

He had his foot in the stirrup, when the sheriff laid his hand on his arm.

"Wait a bit," he said, quietly. "I think it is said that a picnic is given to-day by Señora Downing for Doña Raquel Arteaga who is visiting in Los Angeles. How can she be at the same time at the San Joaquin ranch?"

"I know not anything of the picnic, señor, but I know a woman rode her horse into the ranch at dark last night, and they say it is Doña Raquel Arteaga; and she has a fever, and screams and laughs all night in the room of Doña Ana. I know, for I am called after I am asleep, to get wood for a fire. No one sleeps, and outside the window I hear all what she screams, and it is enough to freeze the blood,—all of altars where blood is, and a ring that she cries for; and I am glad to get away and ride for Rafael Arteaga."

"Rather thin, is n't it, all of that story?" remarked one of the ranchmen. "Bryton, when we asked you to join us did n't you stop to send word to the Downings that you could n't attend their little celebration in the hills?"

"Yes."

Bryton had turned from the others and was rolling a cigarro. He replied without looking up from his task.

"And it was given in honor of Doña Raquel Arteaga and the bishop?"

"I understood so."

"Understood? Why, that was the reason Arteaga gave for refusing to come along," broke in one of the other men. "I heard him."

"That 's so; I did too, and I thought at the time a

picnic for a woman and a priest was a mighty small excuse to give for evading—"

"Careful!" And the sheriff shot a warning glance at the speaker. "A newly married man was excused, even in Bible times, from going to the wars, so Arteaga's reason is all right."

"Just a moment," said Bryton. "I am as certain as it is possible to be of anything one does not see, that the boy tells the truth. She is there, and she is ill. Let him take the message."

"What makes you think so?" and the sheriff eyed him carefully. Bryton's jaw set stolidly, though his face flushed.

"I know it; that's all," he said, briefly, as he turned away.

"But—"

"The boy is speaking the truth; I know it!"

The sheriff looked after him a moment, and then spoke to one of the others.

"Just keep the boy here a bit until I can see clearer," he said, "if Bryton knows."

He tramped after Bryton, who was going for his own horse tied in the shadow of a pepper tree.

"Bryton, tell me *how* you know!"

"I can't do it. Take my word or ignore it, as you like."

"But, hell, man! it is not your word; it is only your impression! Give me your word as to how you know it, and I'll take it quick. I suppose it's some inside family history you've dropped on; but the lady is at Los Angeles, and it is some other woman they are nursing at the ranch and deceiving the servants about. That is my theory. There are some women mixed up with that Flores outfit, and I happen to know that El Capitan, who is the brain of the gang, is related to the folks at that ranch. Now, is it reasonable to think that Arteaga's wife would ride at dark, alone, over this country where hold-ups are so common? Would he let her? Would not the Downings have known?"

"They probably did know, and Rafael Arteaga certainly did," returned Bryton, impatiently. "Their picnic was more a matter of policy than a pleasure party. They wanted the bishop there, to put an end to that church fight. They wanted Doña Raquel Arteaga to serve as an attraction and help them. She has absolutely refused all along to assist with any compromise; and to avoid it this time she has evidently ridden quietly out of Los Angeles, and her husband, who wanted the picnic very much, has kept her absence a secret."

"But if she is as sick as this boy says, how could she take a thirty-mile ride on horseback?"

Bryton made a gesture of impatience.

"She is there!" he insisted. "I—I feel that she is there. The sooner you let the boy ride for Arteaga and the doctor, the less likely she is to die."

"Doctor! Did he say anything about a doctor?"

"No."

"You see, if the woman was very ill, the fellow would say it was a doctor he was riding for."

"No; it would be a priest. These women do their own doctoring. If herb teas and prayers can't save a life, it is let die. Good God! She may be dying now while we talk. Let the boy go!"

"Well, I'll be damned!"

The sheriff was staring at Bryton, whose face was white and set. He was untying his horse, with quick decided movements, and cinching up the girth.

"If you don't send the boy on that errand, I'll go myself," he said, curtly.

"Well—I'll be—" The sheriff broke his sentence midway, to stare at Bryton in amazement. "What the devil is it to you?" he demanded. "Arteaga is no bosom friend of yours, is he?"

"Not that I know of. If the boy doesn't go, I go! The girl may be dying, and the help she wants, she's going to get. Speak up!"

He was in the saddle, and the sheriff, with one look at him, walked back to the group.

"Boy, do you carry only a message to Don Rafael Arteaga?" he demanded, "or is it a written letter?"

"A letter," said he, sullenly, "and Doña Ana raise the hell if you don't let me take it."

"Ah! The Doña Ana! I thought so. Doña Ana is an interesting little lady. Let me see the letter."

The man hesitated, but finally pulled the letter from his pocket. The sheriff took it and walked back to Bryton.

"I 'm humoring your queer notion all I know how," he observed; "for I want you south with us instead of taking the back trail. You read Spanish; the letter is not sealed. Read it."

Bryton read it aloud, slowly. Ana had not minced her words.

"RAFAEL ARTEAGA:—

"For the love of God, come quick to Raquel. Among us, some way, I think we have killed her. That she is too good for you is no reason that you should let her ride alone with a heart-break. I think myself she does not want to live any more, —and no medicine cures that. Maybe you cannot cure it either, but it is your place to be here if she dies.

"Your cousin,

"ANA CARMENCITA MENDEZ."

"You see," said Bryton, handing it back. "I told you."

"I see," conceded the sheriff. "It reads all right, but there is always a chance of—" He folded the paper thoughtfully, and stared hard at the ground. "This is all a ticklish business, Bryton, and if Flores's friends have got wind of this little *pasear* of ours, they may send all sorts of scare messages where they will do most good. These greasers have tricks of their own, and most of them are cousins—see?"

"I see; but that is not a message of that sort. Does the boy take it, or do I?"

"The boy takes it, and I'll send a man with him to be sure he takes that message and no other; and you, if you are so keen for the road, can ride south and investigate before Cousin Ana can expect any reply to her message."

"I—ride alone to San Joaquin ranch?"

"That's it! You've got the best horse in the bunch. If the whole outfit rides in, they'll get scared, but one man alone on his way to San Juan, that looks all right. You may chance on things worth while, when we finally catch up."

"But there are other men—men who know the family better."

"Not one would be so apt to note the points we need. The family is square, but of Cousin Ana there have been some curious things said. She is the one of the lot who openly claims El Capitan as cousin. That's all we really know, but keep your eyes open."

"Let me see the letter again."

The sheriff handed it to him and looked at him curiously as he half turned away to read it, and his eyes sought out the one statement: "I think myself she does not want to live any more, and no medicine cures that. Maybe you cannot cure it either, but it is your place to be here if she dies."

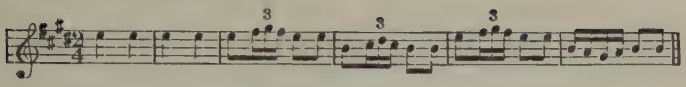
He pulled his hat low over his eyes and gathered up the reins.

"All right," he said, briefly. "I will go. Adios!"

A little later, and only a cloud of dust marked the way in the south that he had gone; and the mist in his eyes, hidden so well from the sheriff, was dashed away by his hand, but came back again and again.

"It is your place to be here if she dies," he repeated, grimly,—"my Doña Espiritu—my beloved! The message was written to him, but fate sent it first to me, and I—I will be with you to-night. You will not be again alone with the heart-break."

Indian Torture Chant.



CHAPTER XII

TOWARD evening Raquel grew more quiet, and Ana, seeing that the fever was abating, gave herself much blame for sending in such haste for Rafael; and what she had written to him only the good saints could tell, for she had been so frightened she had possibly told him unpleasant things!

However, all things could be endured if only Raquel would open her eyes in reason once more, and lift the load of self-blame from the heart of Ana.

Not only the young girls, but the mistress as well, kept a respectful distance from the room where Raquel lay, adjoining the hall. Her moans and strange words had filled them with dread, but no more so than had the grovelling fear of the old Indian woman. All day she had crouched at the door like a patient animal, waiting the end. Sometimes

she muttered to herself in queer Indian words, sometimes she crept to the couch of Doña Raquel for a little while, and then back again to the door, always mumbling or praying, and always insisting that the mother of Raquel had come from the grave to tell things, and that the last of the kings was gone now for always!

Any attempt at a question, any interpretation of her mutterings, would arouse her to a realization that she was among new people in a strange land, and her lips would shut in a straight line, to be kept shut so long as she was conscious of their presence.

The Indian servants crept past the door, with fearful eyes fixed in dread. She was of another race and another tongue than their own forebears, straight and slender even in her old age; darkest reddish-bronze in color, while a San Juan grandmother was always fat, and nearly always black. Beside them, Polonia looked almost Caucasian. Yet she proudly denied any white blood; she was an Indian of a hill tribe of the south, the name of which she would not utter.

All this, and her mutterings, and the wild words of her mistress, put terror into the heart of the San Joaquin household. The girls huddled together and whispered tales of witches and ghosts, and thought

she looked like each in turn; and Doña Ana got great credit for courage in staying in the room with her in the night-time.

But all their vague fears were changed to a definite terror when one of the Indian children found the clay image by the aquia, and in its yet moist members all the pins, for the stealing of which half the children around the ranch had that morning received a taste of the rope's end.

Such a gray-faced, wailing lot as scampered up from the aquia! Girls screaming, old women wailing, and the mothers herding the children out of reach of the accursed thing!

All was explained now, about the sudden awful sickness of the Doña Raquel! The Indian woman from the south was a very devil! Doña Raquel had perhaps had to whip her some time, and she had waited until she was with her in a strange house to do this thing: that was why she crouched at the door as if on guard; she was afraid some one might enter to pray, or with holy water, or any of the helps of the saints. And after the life had gone from Doña Raquel, who could tell that she might not kill others, even all of them on the ranch? Since she had in one hour's time changed her mistress from a well woman to a crazy woman who laughed, how long

would it take to do the same for a dozen? Not a day! In a week she could kill them all!

Panic seized the entire herd. They raced in terror for the ranch-house and overwhelmed the mistress with their fears. Her daughters clung together, white-faced at the frenzy facing them. The men were out on the ranch and ranges; Don Enrico was with them, and there was no one to control the dark mob of fanatic faces, any more than one could head a stampeding herd of cattle: that was what terror developed in them — the mad, unreasoning rush of animals to trample underfoot, or tear to pieces, the thing they feared.

The mistress could only gasp, "Pray to God — pray to God!" but her voice was lost in the tumult of the wild chorus. It was too late for prayers; prayers were no good after a devil had got hold of any one! Then there was only one thing to do, and they had the knife for the meat and the axe for the wood! A devil could be burned out, or drowned out, and there was not water enough this side of the sea for the drowning; therefore —

In vain their mistress screamed, and her daughters clung to the bare brown arms of their serving-women. They were thrown aside in the stampede of the savage herd. Let the lady say what should be done with

white blood; but this was an Indian, and an Indian of a strange tribe and country!

Even in their panic the bovine cowardly herd remembered that fact; there would be no Indian relatives of the witch to wreak vengeance on them; she was the devil's own, and she had no other kindred!

They tore across the hall, sacred at other times to the family, and Ana, rising in wonder at the tumult, was met at the door by the mob. She retreated to the couch of Raquel, with outstretched arms to protect her guest, as she commanded that they be gone.

Her words were scarcely heard. At the door, crouching, and with covered head, they found her they wanted, and dragged her unresisting through the hall and out into the open.

The mistress, sick and half fainting, stumbled to her own room, and cowered at the altar, with one daughter clinging to her and sobbing, while the other stood at the portal of the patio and called for some of the boys, or a man, or horse for any one who could ride for help and stop the horror.

"Mother of God! They make the fire!" she screamed.

It was true. They were dragging the wood and making ready for a fire. Children followed their

mothers, gathering leaves and straw. One black-skinned creature had brought a shovel of coals, and was lying prone on the ground beside it, blowing it with her breath until it glowed and sent demoniac lights into her heavy-lidded eyes. One old hag held the devil's witness, the clay image, before the accused, and after one brief look Polonia made no struggle. It was fate; she had known from the feverish words of Doña Raquel that some one must die as sacrifice.

Then she began to croon a strange whining chant, and the hands of those holding her fell away in sudden terror of even the touch of her. Slowly she stumbled to her feet, and looked at the sun, and raising her old hands toward its lowering light, waved them to and fro in weird salutation, never checking the strange song or chant.

Ana had a pistol, and stood in wavering uncertainty as to whether she should run out, or stay on guard beside Raquel; but to the final adjuration she responded as one suddenly aroused from a stupor of fear, and rushing to the little plaza she screamed loudly and then fired two shots in quick succession; then after a deliberate little pause she fired once more, and with pale cheeks turned toward the door, trembling, and waiting.

"God be praised! See, help is coming," gasped

Juanita, pointing northward. "Good! The dust—the man on the horse—and how he rides—how he rides!"

Ana watched the rider, fascinated and weak with terror. Juanita was laughing and crying with joy, but her cousin stood pale and motionless, and said not a word as the horseman swept past the garden to the back of the house, where smoke was rolling up in a white cloud.

He was none too soon. The fire was leaping in long tongues from the crackling sycamore boughs. The dark faces of the fanatics were alight with frenzied eagerness for their pious task of destroying a witch before they might be interfered with. They had heard the screams and shots, and knew what they meant, and the log they were tying the witch to was held upright by many willing hands.

Her hands were already tied together; there was nothing left to do but fasten a rope around her at the waist, and toss both log and witch into the hottest corner.

And then Juanita ran screaming toward the group, and back of her rode a man on a fiend of a horse, knocking the pious devotees right and left, and caught up the limp figure of old Polonia and flung it on the saddle in front of him.

She opened her eyes and looked at him once as he raised her from the ground, and then closed them and looked no more. It was all of no use — neither the holy water to keep away the thought of him, nor the witchcraft to take the life from him. It was the accursed Americano, and the charm had only served to bring him more quickly!

After the first staggering blow from the stranger's horse, some of the stronger spirits rallied, and lunged forward to drag the woman from her rescuer, while others lashed his horse that it might become uncontrollable. Two able-bodied wenches held on like grim death, despite the quirt which he brought down across their shoulders again and again, while he held the horse and Polonia with one arm.

The animal, between the lashing of the mob and the roaring of the flames, was leaping madly, and the rider had all he could do to control its terror. Any moment a shot, or a club, or a stone thrown at his own head might give them two victims instead of one. That was Juanita's one wild fear. She screamed for Ana with the pistol, but Ana had sunk down, white and trembling on the doorstep, as she saw a black form suddenly appear in the midst of the howling mob of savages. An instant she saw him on the outer edge of the leaping, struggling circle, and the next he

was by the head of the horse, and a strong arm struck right and left until there was space enough to show he was a bronzed, bearded man in a priest's habit.

"Back to your kennels, dogs!" he cried, sharply. "Since when have ye dared strike at gentlemen? On your knees, every one of you! On your knees!"

The younger girls and children dropped in the dust, but some of the older were less willing to give up.

"She is a witch, father; she is killing a woman," cried one; "it is right a devil be put in the fire!"

"Then how hot must the fire be made when your day comes!" he replied, and raised his hand and spoke slowly, solemnly, "Thrice heated will that fire be for the thrice-accursed! To your knees, in the name of God!"

With sullen, shamed, disappointed faces, they obeyed. A white man who is a stranger they dared attack, if enough of them were together, but not a priest — a priest who could hit hard enough to knock a bull down.

"That was a close shave, padre," observed the American, with a breath of relief. "They had this poor old wretch almost pulled in two — will you take her?"

The priest made a step forward, and then halted and smiled, as in vague perplexity.

"I have not the pleasure of understanding English," he said, gently.

Ana arose and came forward; she was still very pale and still trembling; she looked at the priest and tried to speak, but the words were smothered in a half sob.

"My daughter," he said, quietly, "take courage." Then he glanced at the pistol still in her hand. "It was you who fired? That was right. I was on the hill in the edge of the wood, and it is well you sent that warning. Your American friend said—?"

"Oh, I speak a little Spanish too," remarked Bryton, in that tongue; "it is the woman with the tied hands I wanted you to take."

The padre did so, untying the rope deftly, and steadying her wavering figure, while Bryton slipped from the saddle, and spoke to Juanita, who had the one welcoming face he had seen.

"I know you," she said, eagerly. "Did I not see you at San Juan Capistrano, at Alvara's and at the Mission? I was sure of it. This is my cousin Doña Ana and Father—"

"Libertad," the padre interrupted, briefly, and spoke directly to Bryton, "from Mexico."

"You will think us all savages to allow this, father," and she pointed to the huddled Indians

and the leaping flames; "but it was all so quick — like that — no one could think! My mother is in hiding from it, and —"

"Father," said Ana, speaking for the first time, "a priest is needed in the house. We have a woman who may be dying. Will you come quickly?"

She was eager to separate the priest from the others, and her speech was nervous and eager.

"Dying?" he repeated, "is that what they meant when they said the Indian had killed a woman?"

"Yes, father," broke in the quavering tones of old Altagrazia, "here it is — the devil she made!" and she held up the clay image, from which the head had been broken in the *mêlée*. "One day ago the lady is well and rides like a caballero, and this day the sun goes down and she dies. The Indian from Mexico put on the curse!"

Old Polonia understood, and screamed denials in her native tongue, and then turned to the padre and pointed to the American.

"It is that man!" she cried, shrilly, "he is a devil! He does not die — not for anything! And while he lives he breaks the heart of my mistress. It is he; that is the man! Put on him the curse of the Church, father! Put on him the curse to send him to a desert where he never can find a road again!"

The padre smiled grimly. "That is all they use their religion for after a century of Christianity," he observed. "They still stick to their devil-worship, and call on the Church only when they want maledictions or absolution. Woman, you talk like a fool. Did you do this?"

He took the headless clay pin-cushion and held it before him. Polonia flashed one vindictive glance at him and then nodded her head sullenly. It was bad luck to lie to a padre.

"It was to save her," she muttered, "but the Americano is a devil, and nothing kills him."

She turned one glance of hate and fear upon her rescuer, and moved toward the house.

"She means you?" asked the padre.

"Oh, she is crazy, that old Indian," cried Juanita; "always she makes me afraid. The Señor Bryton she never perhaps has seen until this minute. That is her thanks that he pull her from the fire!"

The padre turned for one level look at the pale face of Ana.

"Your name is Bryton?" he then said, quietly. "Will you, Señor Bryton, see that these savages do not attempt another roasting, while I look to the woman who is dying?"

Bryton turned to Juanita.

"Is it so bad as that?" he asked. "The Doña Raquel —"

"We think she is better this evening; still, it may be a fever coming; one never knows. Ah! there are my father and the men."

Don Enrico Cordoba and some vaqueros rode madly through the corral and into the place of the huge bonfire and the still kneeling Indians. Now that their white heat of passion was over, they remembered only the beating they would get, and crouched doggedly where the padre had bidden them; the younger ones wept with fear when Juanita told her father the story.

"Holy God!" he shouted in a rage, breaking in on her recital. "In my house to trample on my family and drag a woman to the fire! Tomás, count every head and remember every name. In three days every one shall be tied to a tree and whipped; if one runs away, she shall be caught and whipped twice, — once here on the ranch, and once on the Mission plaza of San Juan, on a Sunday after mass. You cattle, you dogs, you devils, begone from my sight!"

He struck right and left with the green-hide reata, spurring his horse after those who stumbled along too slowly to suit him, striking old and young alike as they ran wailing with terror at the promises he had

made them, and which they knew would be kept. The Mexican master was quite as prone as the Indian servants to find acute methods of torture or punishment.

When all were despatched he rode back, puffing and laughing, to his daughters and guest, with whom he shook hands heartily.

"Holy saints! but we did ride when we saw the smoke; it looked like the house on fire. It winds a man, a ride like that at my age," and he shook his fat sides with laughter. "Come inside and have a glass of whiskey, Señor Bryton. We met at the alcalde's last year when the army officers were in San Juan? Yes, I thought so. I am glad you have come to my house, and—who knows—you maybe saved my wife and my daughters as well as the old woman. When these savages get the taste of blood, they are crazy wolves, never fighters in the open, brave only when there is a mob like that. Come in, come in! Juanita, go tell your mother we have a guest who has saved you all. What was it you said of a padre? where is he?"

"With Doña Raquel, father."

"She is worse?"

"We do not know, but thanks to the Virgin, she no longer laughs or cries. Ana is there. If she live

or die, we all feel the padre has come if the husband do not."

"Humph! Oh, yes, yes, always the priests!" he grunted. "Women can't keep house without the padres. I think I build a chapel for my women; then they can pray all the time to be sure they save my soul," and he laughed skeptically; then he tossed aside his sombrero, and brought bottles and glasses to a little table of marble on the veranda. "Will you have whiskey, or the bottle of wine?"

"I prefer your own wine of the ranch, Don Enrico," and Bryton poured out the white moselle, of which the Cordoba family was justly proud; "I think the padre was also off a journey, señor; perhaps a swallow of this fine wine —"

"Oh, let the women alone to look after the wants of the padre," laughed his host. "They own my house whan they are in it, though sometimes I never see them. 'How much money do you want?' I say when they come, and that ends my business with the padres! I buy and sell with them and get beaten at monte or *malia*, but I let women do the praying with them! Here comes my wife. Refugia, this is the preserver of your house, the Señor Bryton. Have some whiskey, dear; you are still pale."

"Pale! Never shall I get over this day. Think

of the shame of it! Doña Raquel Arteaga has been entertained like a queen by the bishop, and when she honors our home, her servant is dragged out to be burned! The word will go out that we are savages. Enrico, never so long as you live do you leave this house again without a man in it!"

"Surely not. Drink the whiskey, dear, and be composed."

Doña Refugia drank the fiery liquor, and appeared to enjoy it very much, but it had not a quieting influence. It rather helped her to remember and recount all the details of her own stages of fear during the stampede of the self-appointed executioners.

"After the night we all had," she lamented, "to have it followed by such a day! God grant that Doña Raquel slept or was unconscious through it all. Had she seen those fiends, it might have killed her or brought back the fever. Juanita says a padre has come, which is the one lucky thing."

"Señor Bryton came first, which was a more lucky thing," said her husband; "all the saints could not have saved the woman from the fire if he had not come when he did. Such a thing has not happened here in this valley since I was a boy. Have some more of the wine; it will give you an appetite for supper."

At the mention of supper his wife remembered that all the help of the kitchen might have deserted the premises under the scourging of Don Enrico's reata, and calling the girls to help, she left the gentlemen to their glasses.

At the hall she halted to ask after Raquel, and in the shadow saw her niece and the padre talking softly. Ana's head was bent as though weeping, and the hand of the padre was smoothing her hair, and his words were reassuring.

"There, there! it is not so bad, after all," he was saying. "You did the best you knew; and now that I am here, there is nothing to do but—"

"Oh, I know," broke in Ana; "you say all this so I will not blame myself. You would do the same if the worst, the very worst, happened."

"It is not going to happen," he said, quietly; then, as he saw Doña Refugia in the hall, "Your friend is surely not so dangerously ill as you fear; by to-morrow—"

Ana looked up quickly at his change of tone, and arose to her feet.

"Here is my aunt," she said. "Aunt Refugia, this is a padre journeying south to Mexico. He—he came at the right moment to help Señor Bryton, and I have asked him to stay—and—"

"Of course," said Doña Refugia, promptly. "Thanks to God you are here this night! Show him to the padre's room, Ana, while I see to supper. Is she sleeping?" she asked, nodding toward the couch.

They did not know; she lay with closed eyes most of the time, and they received no replies to queries, but Ana felt that she only slept fitfully, and then her own muttered words were certain to arouse her to a sort of half wakefulness in which she was simply conscious of the presence of some one without caring in the least who it was. The entrance of the mob had not impressed her mind more clearly than the visionary pictures of the night before.

Old Polonia had again crouched outside the door, in the hall, wordless as before, and, except for some slight disarrangement of her clothing, showing less sign than might have been expected of the horrid scene she had been a part of. She had gone in to look at her mistress, had swallowed some wine offered her by Juanita, and with a short guttural laugh had settled herself outside the door as a sentinel — or near enough to hear the slightest call from Raquel.

The priest regarded her sharply and turned to Ana.

"You are certain it was not Estevan's daughter she meant to harm?" he asked, quietly, but not so low but that the sharp ears of the Indian caught the name.

She pulled a corner of the mantilla from across her eyes and looked at him.

"Sure," said Ana, "why, she was her nurse, and the nurse of her mother before her. She would make a carpet of herself for Raquel's feet."

"The nurse of her mother before her," said the priest, slowly. "Then she is of that strange hill tribe of the temple mountain, and she herself is not a common Indian. To have been nurse to that family of the priests, means that her own family was entitled to notice. Yet she has followed, in her old age, to a strange land. Yes, it must mean devotion. But why does she dislike the American?"

"God knows! She could not have ever seen him before. I thought she lied."

"The hate in her eyes was no lie," observed the padre. "His presence here was lucky, but it is not explained, any more than is my own. To me it looks—well, as I said, he is in with the officers."

"And it is my fault he has seen you—my fault," murmured Ana. "If you would only go at once—"

"I think not; it is a good chance to watch the gentleman. If I were sure that old woman meant her hate for him—"

He stared at Polonia a moment, and then nodded his head.

"I'll take the chance," he decided, and went alone to her and pulled the cover entirely from her face.

"Friend of a daughter of many kings," he said, slowly.

She stared at him, and stumbled to her feet in salutation.

"It is true, my father, but the kings of the hills are dead; and now," pointing toward Raquel, "there will be no more in the land."

"Who knows?" said the strange padre. "There still lives a daughter; guard her better than you did her mother when I carried love messages from Estevan."

"Ai! I know you now. You have become padre, and you guard her from the heretics — the heretics, father," and she pointed toward the veranda where Don Enrico and his guest could be heard in conversation. "That accursed Americano —"

"Sh — h! quiet, you!" and he placed a hand on her arm authoritatively; "make no noise, say no words, but watch him all the time — every time when I am out of sight. Understand?"

She glanced from the padre to Ana, who nodded her head, and at once the dark old face was illuminated; at last she was not alone in this strange land! Others were here who hated the Americano, and that made

them her kindred. She caught the hand of the padre and pressed it to her forehead.

"I watch always," she promised, fervently; and to herself she thought, "After all, we get him killed some way, if the padre, who was a soldier, helps."

They left her in her chosen place, crouched in the hall just outside the door of Raquel, content at last that she was not alone in her hatred of the man whom she blamed for the weary hours of wretchedness lived through by her mistress.

Ana showed the padre to the room set aside always for the use of such priests as travelled from San Gabriel to San Juan. They were not so many of late years, but in this house they were always honored guests, no matter what their order, or land, or language.

"I am afraid — afraid!" said Ana, as she opened the door; "if some one should come who knows —"

"No one will," he said, reassuringly, "and this may be a good chance to learn much. Go, help your aunt, and forget to fear."

Ana sighed, but went as he bade, to the kitchen, where Doña Refugia was doing her best to make amends for the distraction of the cooks. They were like big, fat, frightened children, not one of them of any use that night.

Still, there chanced to be enchilladas made the day

before, and the tortillas took but a little while to bake, and the bonfire in the yard had settled to a bed of gleaming coals where the beef could be barbecued with no delay but the sending of some girls to the creek for spears of peeled willow. Ana glanced out and saw them squatted peacefully around the red heap, turning the poles on which the strips of beef were hung, as phlegmatic as though they had not howled for a human roasting there not an hour ago.

Juanita had made the table look very nice, in honor of the strange American guest who had followed her call and saved the family from the disgrace of such a killing.

He filled her girlish ideal of the heroic, and she was not like some women who thought that California girls should marry only their own race: a big American husband seemed the finest thing in the world to Juanita.

So there were red geraniums on the table, and yellow poppies, and the best new plates brought from a steamer at San Pedro but a month before; they were a bright blue, and Juanita thought the color combination very fine indeed. She ran to put on a new dress, that the stranger might not think they all looked as if the house had been wrecked. Ana, for a wonder, was indifferent to her own personal appearance, and kept

on an old black dress with not even a collar of lace to break its severity.

Don Enrico showed Bryton to a room where he could wash and brush a bit, but so interested was he in his chance guest, that he remained at the door chatting affably, and recounting the word he had received that day that Flores and his men had made a big fight with some cattle people over in Sonora, and had either got a boat at San Onofre and gone out to sea, or else they were somewhere in the San Juan mountains, and of course had spies on the outlook for the marshal or the army men. Don Enrico himself thought it time for the army men to interfere — there were many army men in Los Angeles, and this was no longer a county affair.

"But the devil of a trouble in this country is that too many Mexican men, and women too, will help to hide Flores's men because of Capitan, who has never yet taken a peso from a Mexican, except the Arteagas, and who never fails to strip an American if he starts on his trail. They like that, these Mexicans, whose men fought the Americanos; they are not strong enough to fight in the open, but they like to help this vagabond Capitan, who should have been priest instead of bandit, and who keeps up their fight for them under cover."

He had entered the dining-room while talking, and

so interested was he in his pet complaint against the troublesome outlaws, that he did not notice the tall black figure by the side of his wife.

"Uncle, this is Padre Libertad," said Ana, almost timidly. Don Enrico did not like priests in general; he made the mistake of classing them all with the Catalonian padre of San Juan, whom he disliked so much that he would not eat at the same table. His women folks never knew how he would receive a man of the Church until he was proven to his taste.

However, the good American whiskey had put him in a cordial mood, and he nodded amiably as he took his seat.

"A good day to you, padre," he said. "You tramped a long way in the dust to find trouble, did you? Well, the women are thanking the saints you came at the right time, you and Señor Bryton. So it is all very well, and God send that the fight gave you an appetite."

And evidently something did, for the priest ate like a vaquero off the ranges. Don Enrico felt a growing respect for the man who could eat more barbecued meat than himself, and drink as much red wine. In fact, all did ample justice to the beef of the bonfire built for old Polonia,— all except Ana,— who still looked pale and uneasy, and Bryton, who made a pretence of eating, but who refused a second glass of wine, a thing

the padre noticed with a smile, and their host commented on vigorously.

"You can't drink — you Americans," he insisted; "and look at your plate, — not half empty! It takes students and brain-workers like the padre and me to spoil a side of beef! You are Spanish and of Mexico, padre?"

"No, not even my grandfather came from Spain; so I cannot claim to be Spanish," said the padre. "I claim only to be Mexican."

"And good enough too! Across the line, do these bandits of ours make much trouble these days?"

"No one has complained to me of them. You say they take most from the Americano, but in our country there are no Americano ranches yet; we do not expect to find them there for many years."

"Well, Capitan does go down there sometimes," insisted Don Enrico; "I've heard of it. His family meant him for the Church, but the young devil ran away and joined the army with his elder brother. The Americans shot Roberto; this one was only a boy then, light-weight to ride, and he carried despatches, and never went back to the Church. Oh, he is Californian, all right, — is cousin to half the country. He is — what relation should he be to us, Refugia?"

"He is second cousin to me," said Ana.

"So if you hear of him being in trouble for his soul, say a prayer for him, padre, on account of his loyal cousin," said Juanita, and laughed teasingly; but Ana lifted troubled, dark eyes to the padre's face.

"Do so, father," she said, simply; "for the sake of his soul, remember me!"

"These women!" laughed her uncle; "they are always troubling us about our souls, padre. Don't let them spoil your supper with a list of prayers!"

"And what would become of some of your souls if we women did not say the prayers?" retorted his wife. "God knows, Capitan needs them."

"We all need them," said the priest, quietly.

"Still, I always have understood that he is the whitest of the bunch," observed Bryton.

"There are, then, different shades of blackness?" asked the padre. "I believe the law holds all equally guilty."

"El Capitan's motives, at least, have been different, and it has come to be understood that when extremely brutal things have occurred on their raids, Capitan is never of the party."

"Is it so? I did not know you Americanos gave Mexicans credit for such negative virtues?"

Bryton looked up quickly. There was a mocking

light in the eyes of the padre, and he was smiling across the table. The smile puzzled Bryton as much as the quick alarm in the eyes of Ana. Was she afraid of controversy over the still warm question of Mexican and United States rights?

"I think that, individually, we give each other credit," he replied, "especially to the fighters. It is only the political schemers who make the troubles between the two factions. As for Capitan, he has too much daring not to force admiration even from the people he dislikes."

Ana flashed a grateful glance at him, and a slight flush crept to the forehead of the padre; he gulped down the contents of his glass, and pushed back his chair.

"Do you fear any trouble with those Indians to-night?" he asked, abruptly. "Had I better speak with them?"

"It is better, perhaps, that we say a rosary, and bring them together that way," observed Doña Refugia; "it is the best way. I will have Pedro ring the bell—"

Ana slipped out of the dining-room beside the padre.

"You will?" she asked.

"Surely; a rosary is easy. Why do you look so frightened? Your Americano will not eat me."

"But you don't like him?"

"What does that matter? At least, he says no harm of a man behind his back, and it is true what he says of the politicians. Oh, if he keeps up the compliments, who knows but that we may be good friends yet — after he has paid for the horses he took north? Chut! — that is only jest! Smile a little and help to corral the Indians."

Bryton, with Juanita beside him, had sauntered again to the veranda. Passing the door of the hall, he noticed Polonia still crouched there, and Juanita shuddered and drew away.

"I am always frightened at her," she confessed; "not alone would I go in a room where she is at dark for all the gold they say there is in Trabuco Mountain. It is not so strange to me that the poor creatures were afraid and thought her a witch. If you had heard the Doña Raquel all last night, you also would have thought only witchcraft could make her so suddenly fall sick with a heart-ache for a ring that would save her, and a temple where a sacrifice was. Truly, it was pitiful — her cries. I pulled the pillow over my ears. Only Ana was brave enough to stay close to her, — Ana and the old mummy."

"And Doña Ana — she thought what of it all — the madness — the —"

"Oh, Ana has no love for Rafael; she blames him in some way; and it may be that he does make trouble for his wife — he would not be an Arteaga else. But she never mentioned his name in all her cries, never once. She called always — always for the ring, and laughed that some one who wore the ring was again alive. Oh, it was all of queer crazy things like that — ghostly things — she made laments for. It was like purgatory to hear her, yet Ana was not afraid. She has courage, that girl!"

"She is asleep now?" he asked, suddenly.

"Who — Ana? why —"

"No, no, I mean Doña — I mean the sick lady. She is better — or — how?"

"She notices nothing, and says nothing, but she does not scream for some one who was dead and is now alive, as she did last night, when she laughed and wept; so I think that means the herb teas have checked the fever. Do not you?"

Just then the bell rang in the patio for the rosary, and Juanita, with a word of apology, slipped away, saying diffidently, "Though you are welcome to come and pray with us,"— divided between her wish to have him, and her reluctance to make it obligatory on a heretical guest to attend their services.

"I shall pray with you," he said, simply, "but

I shall remain here. My presence might not have a soothing effect on your servants. I shall smoke a cigar here on the terrace until you return."

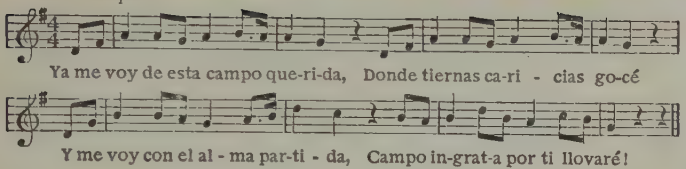
Juanita blushed. She would rather have lingered there herself than joined the others. The dusk was coming on; a few last bars of red lay along the sky line to the west where the sea was, and at that hour there was no corner so delightfully appealing as the great veranda where the gold-of-Ophir roses made a lattice of green and yellow against the warm sky.

Ana entered and lit a candle in the hall and another in the room of Raquel, and went out again with a quiet nod to the American guest pacing the veranda aimlessly, and smoking one of Don Enrico's prime cigarros.

When she had disappeared, he sauntered as aimlessly through the hall to the patio where the dark people were gathered with bent heads, murmuring responses sullenly, scarcely daring to lift their eyes to the group on the veranda.

A few candles had been lit along the wall where the shadows were deepening, and in their soft light Bryton could see Don Enrico and all the men of the ranch — vaqueros and ploughmen alike — kneeling back of the women, and the red light yet showing through the gray of the ashes where the flames had leaped so lately.

El Campo.



CHAPTER XIII

ONLY an instant he gave to it all, but in that instant he made certain that every man and woman on the place was at prayers, except the old Indian woman, who squatted with covered head in the hall, and himself. His movements were no longer aimless. He retreated swiftly to the veranda, and tossed the cigarro into the garden. One glance he gave the wooden-like figure of the old Indian. Only as a last resort would he attempt to pass that way, but if the windows were not barred—

They were not. Ana had gone against her aunt's Mexican rule, which was that all fresh air should be excluded from a sick-room; and while that lady and all her servants exclaimed against the admission

of air, they let the blame lie on the shoulders of Ana, and no one closed the window. It swung wide to the wind of the west, and on the couch within, Bryton could see Raquel's face.

The lids were closed over the violet eyes, and the lips were apart, showing the white teeth. It was still so light that he could see the little flush on the cheeks against the white pillow, and on her right hand one little old ring of plain gold. On the left hand shone the red gold of her new wedding-ring.

She looked so pathetically young and so utterly alone, as she lay there, that all the man in him arose in protest, and a mist of tears blinded him for a moment to the beauty of her face.

"Poor little one," he whispered, "my poor little broken Doña Espiritu—my one lady of the spirit!"

The sound of the words did not wake her, but the sense of them reached her some way; for she opened her eyes suddenly, and without any shadow of wonder they rested on his face.

"I waited a long time," she said at last, "then I heard your voice, and I knew you were coming to me."

He set his lips tightly, and nodded, but did not speak.

"I waited a long time," she repeated, as a child

"Then I Heard Your Voice"

appealing for understanding. "Did they tell you I thought you were dead?"

He nodded assent. No one had told him so, but the words explained much.

"You said you would come back if you lived, and you never came, and they told me — the padre told me — that you were dead!"

"So I am," he said, gently; "and they told me, my lady of the spirit, that you had taken the final vow of the convent — that the night, our one night, was a thing you were forgetting under a black veil. Child, child! they lied to us, and now —"

"Forgetting?" she said, slowly. "How does one forget a night like that, when we walked out of the wilderness into the day together? You never came back; and I — I wanted to be in the world where you had been, so I —"

"I know," he whispered, gently; "I know, my doña of the spirit."

He had not meant to touch her, — only to look at her and speak to her once, and then ride wherever fate might take him.

But she reached her hands to him, and with a smothered groan he knelt by her couch and his arms were around her.

"Don't weep like that!" she whispered, and laid

her hand on his head. "I have wept enough for two, since our carriages passed and I found you had not died. And you — you knew all the time."

"I knew when I saw you kneel in your wedding-veil and take that oath — not until then. I heard his mother say that he was the man you loved; and, soul of mine! you had not said as much as that in words to me. So I —"

"You heard that? Then you know the life I have to live." He nodded, without lifting his head from the pillow of her arm. There are some things hard to face with open eyes, but she felt the shudder that passed over him. Through the opened window came the rise and fall of many murmuring voices repeating the rosary. In the gold-of-Ophir rose-tree two birds fluttered and called to each other in the very whisper of bird notes. The soft lavender-grays of a Californian nightfall were sifting through the warm light of the afterglow, and away there in the west stretched bars of blood red, the last trace of the dying day. All the sequestration of the hour was about them, all the hush of the pause, before the final plunge of their day into the shadows, and the two souls were enveloped by the atmosphere of that ever-recurring tragedy of the hours, and of lives.

How long he knelt there he did not know. She felt

his lips on her wrist, and felt rather than heard the broken words he was whispering — the wild, mad words he had meant not to say, as he had meant not to touch her; then her eyes grew bright as the stars picking their way through the vault of blue, and the golden-haired woman of the carriage belonged to a feverish phantasy of the past hours. She might exist, that golden-haired creature of beauty, but the real life of the man who knelt there in the dusk belonged only to her, to her always, through the bond of one starlit Mexican night of witchery, and this last hour of the California day.

Nothing made any difference now; though she lived in a hell of purgatory all her waking life, the bonds of their dream life would be closer than all else — always, always!

She felt suddenly well and strong. Ah, there was so much in the world to live for! Though they never met, never spoke again, this hour of the tryst would be his through all her life — her hour of a rosary of the heart.

A girl's voice in the patio came softly through the dark in an old Spanish hymn. It was Juanita, and the service of prayer was ending in the usual duo; one of the vaqueros with a fine barytone voice was singing the echoing stanzas of praise.

It was the signal for dispersing, but the man at the

couch did not know that. Neither did he know that the crouched form of the Indian was no longer in the hall. She was waiting in the dusk at the door, and she was clutching with a claw-like hand at the robe of the padre, and muttering, "He is there — it is true. He is there — and she is again bewitched. Now you will help me to kill the American?"

The padre looked at her sharply, and then motioned to Ana, who was close behind.

"Remain with the others. Make some excuse to keep them there — another hymn — anything. And be quick — quick!"

Startled though she was, Ana obeyed, and from the door of the hall he heard again the voice of Juanita; this time it was in a favorite known to all, and the volume of sound told him that Don Enrico himself was joining in the refrain, and that no one would leave the patio until the finale was reached.

No candle burned now in the hall. Polonia had blown it out, that no ray might enter the half-open door of the inner room. She would have gone with the padre, but the sudden vigorous grasp of his hand on her shoulder stopped her where she stood, and without a word being spoken, she knew better than to follow.

Quickly as a cat of the hills, the padre crossed the

hall and stood where he could see the open window and the kneeling man, and the hand of Raquel on his bent head.

"Every night when the dusk comes it will be our time of the day," she was saying. "They told me you were dead, else — but you know. I think the mad hours have gone by for me; I can go on living if — if you do not forget."

The listening priest could not hear what the man said, but she heard, and smiled, and sighed.

"There is one thing," she said, hesitatingly: "the ring, you have worn it a year — and — "

"I know," and he lifted his head. "We need no visible emblem, you and I. I put it back on your finger, my lady of the spirit, — Doña Espiritu; — a pledge of renunciation, and a reminder of the rosary of the dusk."

She took from her right hand the little gold band and gave it to him, and in its place he slipped the onyx ring of the Aztec eagle and serpent.

"I did not tell you what that ring means to my people," she said, as he kissed it in its new resting-place. "Maybe I never can tell you. I — I thought I could be stronger if I wore it on my own hand, for — for the reason that my heart went out of my bosom to follow it, and — and I rode my horse as fast and as far as I could from you, because I — was afraid."

"Good God!" whispered the man. "You don't know what you are saying. Remember that I dare not touch your lips, and that I love you — love you — love you!"

Then the nestling birds in the gold-of-Ophir rose were startled from their repose by the man who strode through the open window and walked blindly out into the garden.

The padre watched the girl's face on the pillow for a moment, and heard her sobs, and retreated softly to the hall, where he met the others; and at Doña Ana, when they were alone a moment, he smiled with a certain elation.

"Look distressed no longer, little one," he said, reassuringly. "You have helped me to a good day's work, very good. Listen! I like your new American friend very much, and when you go to San Juan I count on you to help to make him welcome there. He is going to do me a good turn with Rafael Arteaga, and I forgive him all the horses he helped to save for the army men. He does not know it, but he is going to be my good friend, that fine Americano. He is so fine and so strong, Ana, that he thinks he can put a woman he loves in a niche of the memory, as we put statues of the saints in the niches of the altar-places."

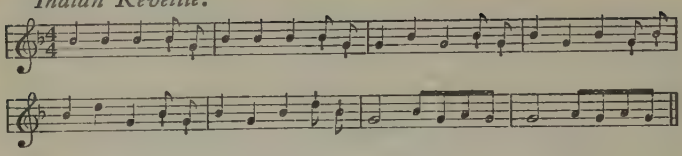
"What do you say?" she queried, perplexed by his smile and words.

"And that though the woman loves him so much that she kisses her own hands where his lips have been, and though he loves her so much that he is half mad at denial, yet he will leave her always there in the little niche of the altar,—just above his head, but in reach of his hands; and the hands will never try to lift her down, Anita. He will only look at her as he rides past, and leave her there to remember."

"I think you have gone mad," said Ana, sharply. "What did the Indian witch tell you in the hall?"

"Ask her!" he suggested. But when Ana did so, she met only scowls and gutturals. And even the sound sleep of Raquel, and the absolute freedom from delirium, brought nothing but suspicion to the heart of old Polonia. It was witchcraft, like all the rest, and the padre should have put the malediction on the Americano when he had so good a chance. Above all, he should not have let him ride away in safety.

Indian Reveille.



CHAPTER XIV

THE padre himself rode away very early. Don Enrico lent him a horse to ride to San Juan, and wondered a little that the San Gabriel people had not done as much; but times were changing in the land. One could not expect the old customs to live when so many strangers were crowding into the country.

The offered horse was accepted gratefully, and the padre breakfasted with the vaqueros, and left for the south before the family were astir. Bryton watched him go, but lingered for a sight of Ana, that he might hear how the night had passed inside the window of the golden rose.

And Ana was the last to join the party at breakfast, but was a very happy creature, compared with the nervous, pale woman of the night before. All were

astonished at the fact that Raquel announced that she had slept like a child and all the illness and fever were forgotten. She was not sure but that she could ride to San Juan, and above all things she was grateful to Ana, and wished both the girls to go with her and visit in the old Mission.

The servants were again the quiet listless folk they had been before the finding of the witch charm. But as Bryton rode out of the patio after many farewells and blessings from Doña Refugia, and cordial invitations from Don Enrico to ride back that way, and consider the place as his own home, there were sullen scowls among the dark people.

On the veranda Juanita stood alone and waved an adios to him. Back of her was the open window of the golden rose, and a slender girlish figure swayed toward him for an instant and then stood erect, and their eyes met and lingered, while he swept his sombrero to the stirrup.

Juanita wondered, since he saluted so gallantly and rode with his face turned toward her veranda until the hedge intervened, why he did not smile; she was accustomed to gayer caballeros. She realized that she must have looked very pretty in her pink gown framed in the blossoming vines, and she turned away with a pout and a shrug. After all, Fernando was

right: American men did not know how to make love.

Raquel was rather pale and very quiet that morning, but insisted upon staying up; she even remembered to ask what the loud calling and running of many feet had meant the evening before; or had she dreamed it? She supposed it was a stampede of horses—was it? Was any one hurt? She had heard the voices of women.

Ana told her it was only the breaking loose of part of a wild herd, but that no one was injured. Old Polonia heard, and blinked and scowled at Ana, but said nothing.

It was noon when Rafael reached the ranch and caught sight of Raquel in a porch-chair under the vines. She paled slightly at sight of him, and turned the onyx ring so that the carving did not show, and by the time he had crossed the patio and walked to join them, her face was a serene mask. The only surprise she betrayed was at the dark look he cast on Ana.

"Are you two in a politician's pay, that you bring me from Los Angeles in a fright of life and death, when I am needed every minute there for the business matters?" he demanded, and saw in a moment that his wife did not understand. Ana only laughed.

"I did it," she acknowledged. "I sent the boy with some truths for you. Your wife was like to die the first night she came. It is by the grace of God she has been saved from a siege of fever. She does not know in the least how ill she was, but if you had heard her gabbling of blood-stained altars and strange wedding-rings, and floods sweeping over her until she screamed to be saved from them, — well, Don Rafael, you might well have forgotten to spare your horse. Three hours would have brought a lover here, but it takes thirty for the husband."

"Why do you two quarrel always?" asked Raquel, indifferently. "I did not know she had sent for you. I was very tired, and the hot sun — something — oh yes, I was ill, and wakened myself screaming. But it is all gone. I can go home."

Rafael tramped the veranda and sulked.

"A fine laugh you have made for me in Los Angeles! They will think you were sick, that I follow my wife!" he said, frowning at Ana. "God of my soul! Why do you not get another husband to worry into the grave, and let your neighbors alone?"

She only laughed again, and bent over her embroidery frame, where white butterflies were being woven on the drawn threads of linen.

"Because no fine, manly, handsome caballero like

yourself rides this way to ask me," she retorted. "All the most desirable men are always married."

"The Señor Bryton was here for the night," remarked Juanita.

"Oh, he was? Alone?" asked Rafael.

Juanita nodded. "And a priest," she added. "They both rode south."

"Bryton alone?" mused Rafael. "I thought perhaps — Did any strangers ride south last night, — a large party?"

No one had heard of any one passing.

"Doña Maria comes in a carriage by this morning," he remarked, "and Mrs. Bryton. I suppose they will want you to travel in their carriage, if you feel equal to the drive to San Juan."

"Oh, she must not go to-day — not for anything!" decided Doña Refugia, who had come from the hall and overheard. "Doña Maria and her friend can stop here a few days, and then perhaps if your wife is strong enough — "

"Certainly, that is the best, the very best," assented Rafael, with a smile of relief. Doña Refugia was making it necessary that Raquel should at least meet the friends of Doña Maria. All was turning out well, after all.

Raquel made no remark, only looked out idly

across the garden to the fields, yellow where the mustard bloom glowed. She knew she could not bear it just yet. Later, perhaps, she could grow strong enough to see Bryton's wife, and hear her voice cut across the days and the dusks here, where his whispers had awakened her to life — some day, perhaps; but she knew it could not be either to-day or to-morrow.

Her husband watched her curiously. If she would only give some sign of what she felt, as another woman would do! How was a man to read a woman who stared out on life like a sphinx, seeing nothing and hearing nothing?

In the same way, she had seemed a bit of wood over that old legend of the curse on San Juan: it had not changed in the least her determination to go back there; yet, since she had screamed of it in a fever, who was to know what feeling it had awakened back of those fathomless violet eyes?

Rafael turned this theory over in his mind, and smoked several cigarros to help to solve the problem, but it was of no use. It had been a very fine marriage for him. Her visit to Los Angeles had further emphasized that fact; but he had the galling feeling of being only prince-consort to the queen, and it was not so pleasant to a man who had been shown favor of a

different sort by many women who would have been glad to give him the king's place.

To marry a girl who is like a wooden saint in a church may be a victory; it may be even romantic when she is half a nun; but it is not comforting to a husband who expects only a wife, a home.

Then across his thoughts came the blue eyes and yellow hair of the woman he had said a reluctant good-bye to in Los Angeles. There was a woman who would have met all his friends half-way, would have promoted his interests, instead of closing doors and refusing to entertain any but the slow old Spanish, who were letting all the money slip out of their hands. In a few years their names would be forgotten in the new world of commerce building, through the Americanos in Los Angeles,—the Americanos whom his wife disdained, but whom the clever little woman of the blue eyes would have won to his interests in so many ways that her influence would have weighed down all the gold of the Estevan heiress, who did not know how to use it. It is only a trick of fate that the money always goes to the wrong people.

So he thought, and smoked, and looked at Raquel Estevan de Arteaga, and wondered by what manœuvre or stratagem he could break down her prejudices;

he wondered, also, how a woman with such eyes and such lips could be so cold. He supposed it was inherited from the nun, her mother.

Rafael had never heard the story of the love, and revenge, and widowhood of that nun. One or two of the older people of San Juan had heard of it at the time of Estevan's death, but none knew how true it was. It seemed too much a bit out of the dark ages of the Indian records to be true of the debonair Felipe, who had ridden and fought to the admiration of all Californian Mexico, who had found women wherever he rode, and had made love as a caballero's duty. It seemed scarcely credible that he, of all men, should have met death in that way on the far southern mountain; and the older men crossed themselves and tried to forget it, and the younger ones never heard of it.

Rafael, smoking on the veranda and watching the serene face of his wife, and ascribing her coldness to the chill of convent walls, understood her no more than had Felipe Estevan understood the nun who had stepped down from her saint's niche for him; and old Polonia, sitting in the shadow, watched them both, and in her dull brain was also a query: Would he ever discover that she was not cold? And would he find out in the same way? Both God and the devil

would be needed to help them all on that day, for California was not the hill of the temple, where the Indian still ruled!

Rafael at last rode out to the range to see Don Enrico about several matters. He did not care to alarm the women concerning the rumors of the bandits, but now, since he had left Los Angeles behind, he would just as soon ride with the vigilantes as not, and Don Enrico could be trusted. It would be five long hours before the carriage with Doña Maria and her bewitching guest reached the ranch, and one must kill time some way.

He killed more time than he had counted upon. As the sun began to lower, and he and Don Enrico turned their horses for the ranch-house, the dogs started a coyote, and with one accord the Don, his guest, and his vaqueros, took up the trail, following the howls with hue and cry over mesa and along creeks, and by the time the dark had fallen, they were far toward Trabuco. They rode back laughing and singing, and making little dashes at racing, under the early stars.

But their laughter was changed when they rode into the corral. News had come from the south, and a bad thing had happened there. The sheriff from Los Angeles had been ambushed by the Flores men at

Niguel Rancho, and nine men were lying dead there. Carts were on the way to take them to San Juan for Christian burial, and Bryton had sent a messenger to Los Angeles with the word; the man had only checked his horse at San Joaquin ranch to shout out the news; that was hours ago. The Indian who had searched the ranges for Don Enrico had come back and said he was not to be found. Doña Refugia had thought it possible that they had heard the word on the ranges and ridden direct to San Juan, and thanked God they had not done so.

She went on to recount to Rafael her terror of the night before, and the awful scene from which she had by no means recovered, and now for this horror to follow so close, and the dread that they might be left alone on the ranch — well, she was having chills at the thought. Ana was the only one not afraid, but with Ana gone to San Juan Capistrano —

Rafael grasped her arm so tightly that she gasped.

"To San Juan?" he demanded. "Alone?" But he was certain of the answer before she spoke.

"Holy Maria! What a grip you have! No. Did I not tell you? Well, we are crazy over it all; we forget. No; she went with your wife, and wild horses could not have held either one of them."

"A malediction on the pair of them!" burst out

Rafael. "God curse the horses they ride, that they break their necks on the way!"

"Rafael, for Jesus' sake, not so loud!" and Doña Refugia tried to put her hand over his mouth, but he dashed it aside in fury.

"Loud! Holy God! What do I care?" he demanded, wrathfully. "Do you know why they go like that? It is all a lie, that ambush story. That devil Ana Mendez has schemed to have some one ride past and call that out to you, so that they could pretend an excuse to ride anywhere away from here; and do you know why?"

Doña Refugia was past speech, and could only shake her head dumbly.

"Well, I will tell you. It is because Raquel Estevan did not mean to meet the friends you said you would be pleased to entertain on their arrival from Los Angeles. Doña Maria she will speak to, but Doña Angela is one of the heretics she vows her doors will not open to. That is the reason."

"But, Rafael—"

"Now listen to me," and he turned his fierce stride across the hall, "and God curse me if I do not keep my word!"

"Rafael!" she gasped, frightened at the white fury of his face; but he held up his hand.

"I swear she shall open her door to admit the women she slighted, first at Los Angeles and again in your home. She will find she has an Arteaga for a master. She shall open her door; she shall receive her; she shall make up for the insult to your home. By God, she shall make up, with interest!"

Then he strode out of the door, leaving Doña Refugia in a cold terror lest the guest of whom he spoke had heard his words through the closed door of Ana's room. It had been given to Mrs. Bryton on the arrival of the party an hour before, and though the door was closed, who could tell that his words might not have been heard there?

But the window on the veranda was open, and Doña Refugia breathed a sigh of relief when, a few minutes later, she saw Mrs. Bryton's fair face emerge from a bower of clematis in the garden. She had been admiring the beauty of the lilies out there, and looked like one herself, — so cool, so sweetly childish in her little appeals for admiration of the beautiful blooms she loved. Rafael met her there, and was enslaved anew by the blue eyes, as he bent over her tiny hand and kissed it furtively, and walked with her to show her Doña Refugia's carnation-beds, and under the starlight help her to see the beauties of the San Joaquin garden.

But old Polonia, who had heard his words to Doña Refugia, and who watched the two walking in the starlight, muttered in her Indian jargon, "Have a care, Don Rafael; have a care!"

Despite Rafael's doubt, it was all true about the ambush. It was quite true, and very awful. It had occurred in the morning, and Bryton had missed it only by his stay that night at the ranch. But he was also quite right when he said the two girls had left the ranch for other reasons. Raquel was quietly preparing to leave, when the word came warranting her in taking Ana. The two rode south with few words, each so wrapped in her own reasons for going that she gave no thought to the reasons of the other.

They found the town panic-stricken. Don Juan Alvara was ill, and Padre Andros absent at San Luis Rey. Raquel rode into the plaza white and weak from the long ride, but sat erect to hear of the things done and the things needed for the dead.

It was almost dark. While Ysadora the cook prepared supper, Ana questioned concerning a padre who had ridden a San Joaquin horse to San Juan that morning, but no one had seen him. Later, the animal was found grazing along Trabuco Creek. Evidently, some one had passed with a wagon or a herd going south, and had given the padre help on the way;

"Here among the Ruins Consecrated"

beyond that, no one thought, except Ana, and what she thought she did not say.

Raquel walked through the little hall of the Mission into what had once been the garden of the padres, the little enclosed bit at the back of the belfry built after the falling of the tower. It was the one little corner from which the world seemed shut out. Under the carved doorway she passed into the old domed vestry with its stone centre cut, or worn by the dripping water, into the semblance of a leering face; "the devil's face," it was called, and people looked from its queer smile to the twisted serpent-like carving over what had once been the arch to the church itself, and wondered what the strange carvings meant, and found no one to answer. They were only a sign left by an unknown Mexican sculptor a half-century ago.

Raquel glanced at them and shuddered, and passed out into the great unroofed, beautiful place of fluted pillars and carven cornices.

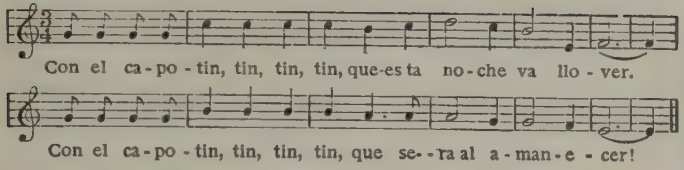
The pink reflection of the sunset yet lingered on the mesa and the highlands above the sea. The world of the strange new town to the north was left behind. Here among the ruins consecrated, she breathed the air of home-coming, and paced the old altar-place with noiseless step, and with closed eyes

and hands clasped she murmured prayers not in the book, taught by the good nuns; and she drew great breaths of strength from the wine-like air, and knew that somewhere, riding the mesa, a man was remembering this hour of the rosary.

Ana found her later on the altar steps, with head bowed over her knees. Gaining no reply to questions, Ana felt that she had been weeping. She undressed her and put her to bed in the little chamber of the barred window facing the sea, and gave her all the care a devoted friend could in the grim isolation of the old walls.

And that was the home-coming of Raquel after her half-royal reception in the City of the Angels.

El Capotin.



CHAPTER XV

WHEN Andres Pico and his men rode into San Juan with the doubtful decoration of necklaces of human ears strung on raw-hide strings, there was a breath of relief from the natives: it meant that the bandits had been "confessed," according to the General's naive explanation of the absence of prisoners they knew he had taken; the backbone of the bandit gang was broken.

The vigilantes were the heroes of the hour. As the band of outlaws divided and fled in various directions, they were waited for at every pass and hewn down by the dozen. Only two — Fontez, who had shot the sheriff, and El Capitan, who had not been seen by any one at any time of the raid — were still missing. One of the prisoners, on being questioned,

stated that Fontez had taken his share of the plunder and started for Lower California; and when questioned as to El Capitan, swore wrathfully, because El Capitan had disagreed with Flores over the raid, refused to be counted in, and in consequence they would all go to hell! If El Capitan had helped, things would have been different, very different. He had voted against starting out with fifty men to drive the gringos from Southern California; he had fought them before in the open, and knew them. He had told Flores he was a fool, and left them in Santiago Cañon, and ridden away, and after the slaughter of the sheriff and his men he had ridden out of the mustard on a horse of the San Joaquin brand, and told them to ride south and stop for nothing; and no one had seen him since. They had not taken his advice — and now it was all over! A little later, it certainly was over for that particular unfortunate, and his ears were added to a string decorating a swarthy ranchman, who was especially lionized because of his gruesome trophies.

In the plaza of San Juan Mission, Ana listened to the hero of the necklace reciting all the glories of the campaign, and shuddered at the ghastly witness of its veracity. Raquel, standing beside her horse, listened also and felt a loathing of it all. Regular war, such as she had heard of, had never appeared so awful as

this series of slaughters from ambush, where the victors of either side decked themselves like savages.

"It is bad that we have no soldiers left who are hidalgos," she remarked. "The Apaches carry scalps at their belts; I did not know people did so who had learned their religion from the padres."

She mounted and rode toward the sea, the only woman who dared venture alone out of sight of the protecting walls of the Mission in those days. The man with the necklace looked after her, and then up at the line of grain-sacks still left as a barricade along the roofs of the corridor. Behind them, men with rifles had lain through the days and nights when the panic was at its worst, and women and children had huddled in dread of massacre in the inner court.

"Does the señora forget all that," he asked, "or is there a caballero to guard her where she rides?"

Ana turned on the hero, glad of an outlet for her pent-up anger. "You — you butcher!" she said between her little white teeth. "You know Rafael Arteaga is not here. What other man would ride with his wife?"

"Who knows?" he laughed, easily. "The lady is not afraid, that is clear; and El Capitan is somewhere in the hills, or the willows."

She said nothing, realizing that he was watching her

closely, for all his apparent carelessness. When she continued silent, he laughed and swept his sombrero to the ground and sauntered away. She knew then that he had simply tried her, to see if by any chance she showed knowledge of, or fear for, the outlaw she had never disowned as cousin.

Teresa, seated beside her, saw her changing color, and reached over, patting her hand.

"Even when thou wert little the Capitan made a pet of thee," she said, kindly; "and now every friend he ever had is being watched. If — if — in any way you could warn him —"

"Warn him? How can we, when no one knows? I would walk barefoot across San Juan Mountain if I knew where he was hidden. He may be dying, or dead."

"That is so," decided Teresa, placidly; "and it would be better. They will always hunt him if he is alive."

There was silence between them for a little while, and then she added, "Well, there will be no mourning for him in the Arteaga family. Rafael will be glad."

"Oh, he!" muttered Ana, with impatience. "He is hanging on the skirts of Doña Maria these days, when he should be here with these other fine gentlemen." She pointed to the plaza where the vigilantes

and their friends were gathered preparatory to starting on a new trail suggested by an Indian who had seen a white man without a horse somewhere in the hills.

"On the skirts of Doña Maria," repeated Teresa, her little eyes twinkling with interest. "It is true, then — it is that English woman still?"

"Still? How you talk! Is it so long since Los Angeles?"

"Oh, it was long, long before that! I was — Santa Maria! — I had a fright for a while! I thought there would be no wedding. He was crazy as a boy over her. It started, oh, with only a pin-point of a chance; for the Americano Bryton was here, and her eyes were for him! And then — Basta! All at once things changed, and Doña Angela and Don Rafael were never apart; and if she had not been married, I think always Raquel Estevan would have had no husband here in San Juan Capistrano."

"Raquel — does she know?"

"Raquel Estevan is too proud to show if she knows, just as she is now! Never will she go along or follow him when he rides abroad, but if she knew his time was with that heretic — she hates the heretics!"

"She is patient with him."

"Oh, sure; she is a good wife. But if she cared more, would she do as she did when the girl Marta

came to the Mission with her child? On my soul, I think Rafael was afraid when she gave to Marta the bed and the clothes, and counted out how many cattle she could have,—to say no word as to how she stood herself as godmother at the baptism! The padre laughs over that!"

"And Rafael—?"

"Rafael—God knows what he said to her! He tried to make her send some one else as godmother, and she would not. Ysadora heard her say 'It is for your soul's sake, and the souls of your children, Rafael,' and he turned white and walked away."

"Poor Rafael," mocked Ana, "I do not think that he has much of a soul. It is as when a man sees he is beloved for his bravery, and all the time he is afraid of his own shadow, and hopes the one who loves him will not discover his weakness: that is how Rafael feels when his wife does penance, and prays for the soul he has not."

"How you talk! We have all a soul; the padre says so."

"Oh, the padre! The soul of our padre is also like a grain of mustard seed—so small, and no soil to grow in! Never could I confess to him. I wait until Padre Sanchez comes; no one but a Franciscan priest do I believe in."

"Ai! and if you should get sick and die, and Padre Sanchez on some other side of the world? He is always travelling; never will he settle and gather 'dobe dollars like our padre. Suppose he should not come; you would die without confession?"

"No; I would hang on to the edge of life by some thread of prayer until he came."

"Padre Pedro of the north was here last month: that man makes me afraid. He tries to be a saint, and is so often under vows. This time it was a vow not to speak, and Padre Andros was glad when he took to the road. It was like a black ghost to see him walk the plaza with a black hood over his head, and never a word or look up from the ground. You would think the saints he prayed to lived somewhere in the roads. We thanked God and emptied some bottles with the padre when he was out of sight."

"But he is a good man."

"Oh, he is a saint; but we can't feel easy with saints in San Juan. That is why your Raquel Estevan will always be outside."

"You mean above," retorted Ana. "The devil's face in the stone of the Mission dome fits better this place of the necklace of ears."

Teresa shuddered.

"It is bad luck to say things of that face," she warned. "Some think maybe it was an Indian god, —I heard an old Indio say so once. Never will I go under the dome of that old vestry since that day."

"How would an Indian god be put in a Christian church?"

"No one knows," and Teresa crossed herself. "The old Indios say it is bad luck to talk about it; so whatever the story is, it has been forgotten, and that is better. When I was a little child the old Indios told strange ghost and curse stories, and we were all much afraid; now the old Indios are mostly dead, and no one else remembers, only all are still afraid of the earthquake ruin at night."

"They are sheep; they are afraid of their shadows at night," retorted Ana; "that is why Raquel will always be, as you say, 'outside'!"

"Well, she goes against the padre, and that is always bad. It is bad luck to fight a padre; he can refuse absolution."

Ana made no reply. She was very weary of the endless, endless stories of Raquel's unlikeness to the other women; and what they did not understand they would like to condemn. She knew so well that in Mexico the Doña Luisa and the Doña Raquel had met only the hidalgos when they went for a brief visit

to the world of people, but in San Juan there were no hidalgos; only the mixed races without pride of birth or distinction, apart from the lands and cattle around them on the ranges. Ana could feel, better than any other, why the wife of Rafael rode alone to the cliffs above the sea, seeking kinship there in the isolation.

In vain Ana had tried to solve the problem given her by the padre at the San Joaquin ranch that strange evening: his quick change of attitude toward the Americano,—even asking her friendliness and her welcome for him if he crossed her path. The queer idea of the Americano's love affairs was the most puzzling of all: it never occurred to her that he meant Raquel—Raquel, who avoided all heretics! Still, it was strange that she never thought of the Americano's love affair without involuntarily trying to picture a woman who would look like Raquel. And she did not dream those two had ever met.

As Pico and his men got into the saddles and started north she heard him mention Bryton's name. The latter had evidently tired quickly of vigilante work; at any rate he had disappeared as effectually as El Capitan,—no one had seen him for over a week. And of course no one had time to hunt him up.

At Trabuco Creek the vigilantes passed an Indian

boy loping easily along the valley road. When stopped and questioned, he stated he was going to the Mission from San Joaquin ranch. The brand on the bronco corroborated his story, and he was let pass with slight attention; yet they would have found him quite worth while.

Ana had gone with Teresa to make a little visit to Don Juan Alvara, who was still ill, and very impatient at being housed up when all the world of San Juan was astir to see the cavalcade of avengers. He was asking sharply why Rafael Arteaga was following his English partner's example, and keeping out of the work of search or battle. It was to be expected that Don Eduardo Downing, after being forced by El Capitan to pay over a thousand dollars as tribute to the Flores bandits, would feel that he was exempt from active service in pursuit of them; they had cost him quite enough. And of course he had never anything but an alien's interest in the country, the interest of dollars; but with Rafael Arteaga it was different. What was he doing these days, when every man who held stock and could fight rode abroad?

The women exchanged glances. Of what use to tell Alvara it was a woman? He would only be more disgusted, and might say things to Doña Raquel, and that would never do.

Teresa's curiosity as to results led her very close to it, for her new sister-in-law was a thorn in the side of the bovine ponderous Californian, by whom the "brown girls" had been accepted as a part of domestic life. Ever since she had listened that day to the story of vengeance in Old Mexico, she had resented everything about it, even the child of that strange marriage, the child who had inherited—who knew how much?—of the blood and instincts of that saintly, half-Indian nun.

Yes, Teresa would have dearly loved to watch Raquel Estevan when the story was told; also the story of Rafael's latest infatuation; yet, all the Arteaga boys had died violent deaths, and she had no wish to see the last one of them murdered. She was certain that if it did happen, the ghost of Doña Luisa would be at the foot of her bed every night, and she would have to pay a lot for masses. They cost thirty-five dollars since the padre was building new fences around his orchards. So she contented herself with wishing as much as she dared without being held liable by the ghost of Doña Luisa in case of accidents. And then Ana was always there with her eyes, and if any one did tell Alvara, Ana would ferret it out, and she had such a tongue!

While they reassured the old man, and told him

the troublous days of San Juan were nearly over, the Indian boy from the San Joaquin ranch stopped at the gate.

"There is a letter for Doña Ana Mendez," he said. "It came last night. Doña Refugia sent it."

"Doña Refugia?" Ana knew that her aunt could not write, and that the accomplishments of her daughters in that line extended to the ability to inscribe their own names. She glanced at the message, and her lips grew suddenly white as she noted the writing.

It was in pencil, written very plainly. The envelope was folded from a page of letter-paper and sealed with gum of some sort. When she opened it, she found the written page was a communication to Mr. Bryton concerning saddle-horses. But a pencil was drawn through the lines, and around the Bryton letter was written the real message, and it was very brief:

"*A man is hurt here. Can you in quiet help him to San Juan?*"

An arrow and a cross were the only signature.

Teresa watched Ana questioningly. Letters to women were rare in San Juan, where few women could read; it must be of a death, or something of great importance.

But Ana told nothing, only ordered the boy to go to Ysadora for some lunch before he started back, and

to tell Doña Refugia that all was well at San Juan. Though Doña Teresa listened closely, that was all she could hear that was said, and then she knew, of course, that Ana did not intend to remain a widow. She had a lover who wrote letters, an Americano perhaps; the Mexicans did not trouble themselves with such useless learning, now that the old padres were gone.

Ana sat quietly on the veranda for a little while, speaking of matters in general, and then arose languidly and confessed she wished she had gone with Raquel. A ride to the beach was better than to stay shut up in the town. Now that the 'vigilantes had gone, women would dare ride abroad without growing gray with fear.

"Ai! it is not far you would ride, Ana Mendez. You are like other women when it comes to riding alone these days."

"Raquel rides alone."

"Her mother was not of this country, or she would not be so bold," returned Teresa, tartly. "Men have little liking for women as strong as themselves."

"Alas for me!" laughed Ana, "for I tell you now I am going to copy after her. She makes the other women look like sheep. If she would go with me, I would ride to the San Joaquin ranch this night and have no fear."

Teresa shrugged her shoulders.

"You grow like a child, Ana, as you get more years. Your letter makes you young again—so?"

But Ana was out of the gate, and crossing the plaza with a light springy step, as if indeed the days of girlhood had come back. In her eyes was a smile, but back of the smile was a light of new determination. All at once she seemed to have found herself: he was in danger, and had called her.

At the Mission she found the Indian boy with a dish of frijolles.

"How did the letter come?" she asked, but he did not know. It was found under the door, and it had frightened Doña Refugia, and she wanted it out of the house when the men were away. She thought it, maybe, was a demand for money, such as the outlaws had sent Señor Eduardo Downing, and she asked Ana for the love of God to send word back quick what it meant.

"It is only from the padre who borrowed the horse, and he thanks her," said Ana, coolly. "Ride straight home, and talk to no one, or you will get a reata instead of frijolles."

The Indian boy nodded silently. He knew the Doña Ana always kept her promises of that sort.

A little later, Teresa looked out at the sound of

horse-hoofs thundering by, and saw Ana on the road to the sea.

She let her horse have his head until she came to the Rancho de la Playa, when she halted to scan the meadow and sand of the shore, and then bent her attention to the ground, and paced slowly along until she found the tracks of Raquel's horse turning to the right. There was only one road to be followed to the right; she had gone through the little cañon of the cactus and up to the heights above. More than once Doña Ana halted to examine the ground, to be sure that no later tracks had been made on a return trip. Then, away across the mesa she saw Raquel's horse browsing among the sage-brush on the cliff above the sea. Raquel was nowhere in sight; but, knowing she was near, Ana rode quietly along the bluff, until right at the edge of the cliff she saw her stretched at full length in the odorous grasses, her chin propped on her hands, staring down the steeps where yellow poppies nodded to the surf below. A cluster of the blossoms was beside her, and her skirt was torn. She had evidently been down there after them, and was resting after her climb.

"What is it, Anita?" she asked after a brief upward glance. "Is there a spirit of unrest with you also? Some say there is sleep and forgetfulness in

these little cups of gold. I have gathered some and lain here a long time, but it is not true, Anita. There is no forgetting."

Ana slipped from the saddle and came closer. Never before had so much of confession been heard from Raquel Arteaga.

"What, then, do you try to forget, my darling?" she asked, caressingly. "Your love and happiness?"

"Love is not happiness," said Raquel, and laid her cheek against the sheaf of poppies. "Why do people say so? Do they wish to lie, or do they not know? The heart does not laugh with love; it aches. The light and the glory of it comes, and after that comes the earthquake; and the life is shaken out of us, and all we can do is to make ourselves a sacrifice."

"Holy saints! I never knew love was all that!" acknowledged Ana. "It means also to dance, to listen to your lover's songs in the night under your window, and to go to sleep satisfied that he is not with some other girl. It means stolen looks like kisses. I never am sure but that they are sweeter than the kisses themselves, though they do not make one mad."

Raquel looked at her, and smiled strangely, and rose to her feet.

"Ai! you are right, Anita; it is without doubt

"There is No Forgetting"

more wise to love like that. All the girls in the willows think so." As she saw Ana's face flush, she turned in quick contrition. "Ah, forgive me! You do not love as they do, I am sure — those fat brown animals; but, Anita darling, I am a tired soul, and rest is somewhere far beyond the ranges, and — ah, well, — forgive me!"

Ana smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Why should I not?" she asked; "for, after all, you are right. All human things are much alike when they love — the brown girls in the willows also. They nurse their babies and thank the Virgin they are not childless, as I am."

"And you — ?"

"I am thankful to be as I am. When I have children, I want to love the father of them. My people did not ask if I loved my husband. They made the marriage, and God made me a widow. I thank God always that when I marry again I can do my own choosing."

"Oh, when you marry again! Good! When is it to be?"

Ana laughed and then grew grave.

"You may help me to decide," she said, a trifle nervously. "I am going to elope to-night. Will you ride along?"

"Anita!"

"It is up there," and Ana waved her hand toward the blue mountains above Trabuco. "It is a long ride, but the moon shines, and—I am trusting you!"

"And the man?"

"Your husband hates him, and will find fault if you go."

"And he does not come to you?"

"He is—I think he is hurt," said Ana. "And I am going, though I go alone."

"You shall not go alone," and Raquel whistled to her horse. "Come! I needed something of this sort to rouse me from poppy dreams. I ride with you, my Anita; and the man, whoever he is, has my blessing."

They galloped together through the sweet-smelling grasses, and a load was lifted from Ana's heart. With Raquel beside her, she could ride care-free from danger to the man who had called her.

"I have not been told to take any one along," she confessed, "so I cannot mention names; but there is a man hurt, and we must manage to get extra horses away from the Mission, and things to eat, perhaps, for we go where no people live; and—I—that is all I dare tell you."

"It is enough, my Anita. We will ride together

like nobles of old Spain seeking adventures, only we will storm no castles, and wear no colors to denote our caballeros!"

She was elated as a child over the secret journey they were to take over unknown roads. The poppy dreams were left at the edge of the cliff, and she rode lightly across the divide, where at other times she ever halted for the picture of ocean and valley stretching from San Mateo at the sea to San Jacinto of the ranges.

"I knew it was love in thy heart for some one, Anita," she said, smiling. "Religion alone does not make a woman comprehend heartaches for other women. You are the only one of all of them who asks no questions, yet you put your arms around me that crazy night when I rode from Los Angeles, and all at once I felt that I need not hold with tired hands a mask to my face for you."

"Holy Mary! I know, and why not? My family married me to the wrong man," said Ana, easily. "But I was lucky in one thing, and I know enough now to thank the saints for it,—I had not learned what love meant, so the other man had not come."

"And if he had?"

They had checked their speed to descend the steep ravine cut in the heart of the mesa, and giving outlet

to the blue sea. Raquel was intent, apparently, on finding the best footing for her horse, and did not look up at once, but when no reply came she tried to laugh, and repeated the question.

"I did not answer," said Ana, after a moment, "because, Raquelita, when you made me think of it, truly it seemed as if my heart stopped beating that minute. Poor José, my husband! It would have gone hard with him, and my relatives would have cursed me."

"And why?"

"I think I should have risked the purgatory they would have sent me to, but I would ride as we are riding now, straight to the man — the one man."

"And suppose — suppose, Anita, you were bound by a vow to the dead — could you ride away from that? Suppose that so long as you lived you were set to guard one living soul — that each day when you awoke, your prayers were to keep worthy for the task; suppose —"

"No, no! I will not suppose. A woman can endure just so much, no more. I know you are doing all this, my Raquel, and I see that it is forever one big fight and sacrifice, and all your life it will be the same. But, Raquel, when you awake and pray each morning, thank the Virgin at the same time that

the other man has not yet ridden into your heart. I know you do not think of men — that it is to live ever in cloisters! But pray God that the man may never come, Raquel — for a girl is only a girl, after all!"

"Of course, but —"

"Oh, you would argue, because you do not know!" burst out Ana, with impatience. "Raquel, you are so good you are always beautiful; but I tell you truly, that if it should happen — all the saints could not help you. Between your vow for the soul of Rafael and your love for the one man —"

"Well, my Anita?"

"Well, you could not live through it and remain what you are. Any woman would go mad — any woman."

Raquel touched her horse and galloped up the steep hill ahead of Ana. Down the longer one to Boca de la Playa she rode in the same reckless way, and it was not until they had reached El Camino Real that she pulled her horse in, and allowed Ana to come alongside.

"Jesusita! how you ride away from me!" gasped her friend. "Wait until I braid up my hair. Look at it — all the new pins lost, the pretty ones you brought me from Los Angeles. We will send a boy back to hunt them."

Raquel sat silent on her panting horse, looking out on the wide sea and saying nothing. Ana glanced at her white face while braiding her hair, and thought it looked cold and determined, almost angry; and as they started on once more, she reached across and touched her hand.

"Do not make your eyes like cold agates of violet," she entreated. "Truly, I meant not to anger you, and I know you are good always, and think only of your vows. But even the saints have known temptation, my Raquel, and some who might have been saints have lost souls for a man or a woman."

"Oh, my own soul!" and Raquel shrugged her shoulders with a dreary smile. "It is the soul of Rafael I am set to guard. Only that must I think of every day of my life. My own! Only Mother Mary knows what my own may become."

"His mother knew the power of the heretics; it was not fair, Raquelita."

"It is judgment," said Raquel, steadily. "I asked God to give me some work for the Church in the world, instead of within the convent walls. It was brought to me; I accepted it on my knees. What any of us think now does not change that in the least. I must live till I die with that thought."

"So I know," conceded Ana, "and so I thank God

the other man does not come. You would know then how to feel sympathy for the women who fail, or the women who do mad things such as I mean to do to-night."

"Do I not understand? Do I not go with you? Yes, ahead of you, for my horse beats yours," replied Raquel; and from that to the Mission plaza there was only the sound of hoof-beats on the hard road, and no more words of love or lovers.

A man had come from San Diego with a message from Rafael Arteaga. He would be at San Juan in a few days, and was bringing guests for a barbecue. Strange word had come from the vigilantes of the disappearance of Bryton, the Americano. It had been learned that he had not returned to Los Angeles, neither had he gone south. To free Mrs. Bryton from anxiety, Rafael and Don Eduardo meant to find him and make a holiday while doing it.

Raquel Arteaga listened, and Ana noticed all at once how white and tired she looked from the little gallop.

"Get down from the saddle, my dear," she said, appealingly. "Lift her, you, Victorio. Mother Mary! Do not faint, Raquel!"

Raquel did not faint. She thanked the muscular Victorio, who lifted her from the saddle as though

she had been but a little child, and placed her on one of the long seats of brick, while Ana ran for water, and old Polonia crouched beside her and looked up in her face, but did not speak. She had heard the name of the hated Americano, and she had no need to ask questions. It was the witchcraft come over her again; even the sound of his name could bring it!

"No, I am not ill, Ana. I really am not," she persisted. "You say I turn white. Well, it may be I had no dinner—I think I forgot it, or those heroes the vigilantes took my appetite. See! I can stand; I am quite well. I am ready for the San Joaquin ride when the sun goes down."

"But, if harm should come?"

"Never fear. To go will not harm me. I am very strong—stronger than you think. Ai! I shall live long—a long, long time, Anita!"

She arose and passed through the door of the carved Aztec sun and little half-crescents, and Ana looked after her doubtfully.

"It is the Americano?" said Victorio, with a shrug and lifted brows. "Rafael Arteaga is mad after that baby woman—just mad. I think it makes Doña Maria afraid. It would not be well to have the wrong things happen in her house; so they jump at the chance to ride north together, for any reason at

all, and bring Don Rafael to his own wife. That is all the reason they come: Doña Maria is afraid."

"But to bring them here! The Doña Raquel is not fond of heretics."

"I think myself it is the woman and not the religion she will think of when they come," said Victorio; "and she must have heard something,— what else made her look like that?"

"Who knows? A woman may be tired, may she not? You talk a great deal for a man of your years!"

"Oh, it is only to you, Señora. It is as well some one knows who is a friend,—that pretty white baby of a woman has the 'money eye.' Some one should warn Doña Raquel, for who knows where it will end? You know the Arteaga men."

Ana nodded her head.

"We all know them; but, thanks to God, the right woman has come into the family. I do not know what she will do—Estevan's daughter; but Rafael will learn what a curb-bit means if he go too far. Women who do not care whether they live or die are more reckless than the wildest man, Victorio; and Rafael will do well to say good-bye to heretic pets."

Victorio shrugged his shoulders, and did not quite believe. Of course a woman could do a lot with a

man if he was not so foolish as to marry her, but after that what could she do but keep the home and obey? Some of them found other amusements when their husbands rode abroad, but what more could they do than that, even the most powerful?

Of course if Doña Raquel were not his wife, Rafael might be faithful: Victorio acknowledged he knew how that was himself. There was a woman who kept his house, and now after four years of content, the padre was at him for a marriage fee, and was putting the devil in the woman's head, and there was discord. All had been content for all those years, but when the marriage was even talked of, there was trouble; and Victorio had no use for it except, of course, if the woman was dying, or if he was—then the padre could get the marriage made. The money was saved up in case of such need for absolution, but otherwise—

Ana interrupted him angrily, though she knew he voiced the masculine opinion of the valley. She had heard the padre complain that the women had also refused marriage for the same reason; so there was little could be done, and she knew that if Rafael Arteaga should fail openly within the year of his marriage, there would be laughs and shrugs, and the marriage fees would be fewer than ever. The example of their superiors was all that was needed to break all

the little invisible bonds told of in the prayer-books, but remembered so little in the everyday life.

"Oh, you need not rail at me, Doña Ana," protested Victorio; "I am only one — and I feed my children! You do not believe so much in Rafael Arteaga yourself; and, after all, it may come right. It depends most on the woman."

"Doña Raquel Arteaga?"

"Never! She is only a wife; it is the other who is still *the* woman."

Ana flung an angry look at the pessimistic, philosophic vaquero, and followed Raquel, slamming the door after her to emphasize her impatience with his all-too-true statements.

She checked her tempestuous entrance at sight of the wife they were discussing, kneeling at the little altar in the corner of her own room. The tall candles were lit, and before the shrine of the Virgin Raquel was prostrate.

Ana crossed herself and went out softly, half afraid that the argument in the corridor had been heard through the thick adobe walls. This new sign of Raquel's disfavor at every mention of the Americanos gave Ana several unpleasant moments. The letter now in her pocket had belonged to the Americano whom they were coming to search for: dare she

mention it to the girl kneeling there at the shrine? Or did not the news brought by Victorio Lopez make more imperative the need for secrecy? In riding the hills for Bryton, what others hidden there might be discovered for death?

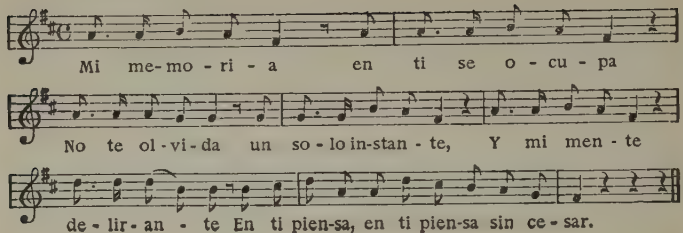
Ana sent an Indian with a pack-mule of provisions to the sheep-herders' cabin in Trabuco cañon, with instructions to wait there until the men came for it, and in every way made smooth the details for the journey of the night.

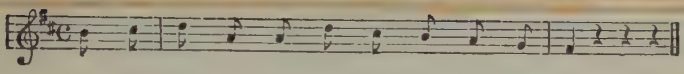
Don Antonio, the major-domo for the Arteagas, had ridden north with the vigilantes, so there was no one to oppose or question the order of Ana, given in the name of Doña Raquel.

Teresa shrugged her shoulders and said some things when the two mounted and rode gaily northward. She hoped Doña Refugia would say some things to them for the good of their souls when they reached the ranch. Ana had always been a little rebel; it was well they married her when they did! No one gave much heed to Ana's vagaries or strange whims, but with Raquel it was different. The opinions of Doña Luisa concerning the convent novice secured as a daughter were well known in the San Juan valley: she was a saint, no less. But Teresa watched the slender girlish form riding away on the black horse,

and hated the grace and daring of her as only gross creatures can hate refined ones, and had her own ideas of two women who were young, riding like that toward darkness,—the darkness where even men scarcely dared ride alone these days. One might be saintly in soul, yet do indiscreet things in this mundane world. And Teresa wished them a lesson, from the centre of her fat heart.

Mi Memoria.


Mi me-mo-ri-a en ti se o-cu-pa
No te ol-vi-da un so-lo in-stan-te, Y mi men-te
de-lir-an-te En ti pien-sa, en ti pien-sa sin ce-sar.



CHAPTER XVI

THE dark was falling when the two girls reached the sheep-herders' cabin in Trabuco. José, the boy with the pack-mules and the led horse, had arrived before them, and, shaking with fear, had built a fire with which to banish the threatening shadows. No herders were there, and to stay in the isolated cañon with the mule and mustang was not to his taste. José belonged to the Mission garden work, or the driving of the cows to pasture, and had little relish for the adventurous life of the ranges. He appreciated not at all the confidence placed in him by the laughing Doña Ana.

But Ana had no desire to trust an older man, even an Indian, and when they reached the cabin she delighted his soul by giving him a gold piece, the first he had ever earned, and telling him to go straight back to San Juan; and unless he wanted his own ears to wear on a string around his neck, he was to utter

no word of having seen any one at the sheep-herders' cabin. His task was over when he left the provisions and extra horses there.

Glad enough to escape so easily from the prospect of a night where wild cats and mountain lions were no strangers, José not only promised, but swore by the Virgin and Jesusita that no one at San Juan should be the wiser for his having seen the ladies in that devil of a cañon. If they never came out alive, he would confess to the padre before All Souls' Day, but until then not a word would they get from him even by whippings and salt water!

Despite the fervor of his protestations, Ana rode up the terrace of the mesa, and sat there watching the trail along the creek until she saw him cross far below, a moving dot against the yellow stretch of sand, and knew that he was indeed moved by winged fear and had none of the courage for spy's work.

Raquel watched the first star break through the blue, and knew that, if he was alive, somewhere in the width of California a man watched it also, and shut out for one brief instant any crowding humanity surrounding him. It seemed a very far-away thing, this tryst of the star, and never — never, any day of her life, durst she dream of bringing it closer.

Ana found her huddled in the crooked white arm

THE ALISO TREE.

of a great aliso tree, and regarded with dismay the quivering shoulders and face hidden against the white bark.

"Raquelita!" she said, in quick contrition. "I have asked too much of you, to ride with me blindfold into the wilderness. Say so, and ride back while it is yet light to reach the road. It was wrong to ask you to share burdens of others. I am at your feet, darling. Do not blame me too much, for—"

Raquel lifted her head and looked at her, and smiled through tears.

"Anita mia, you cannot send me back, for I will not go. Do not fancy me unhappy because—oh—because of anything. I feel, here in the open, more at home than any moment since I came to California. We were of the hill folk, my mother's people, and out under the stars in the night all their old buried instincts awake in me—the pagan gladness of the wilderness."

"You do not look glad," said Ana, doubtfully.

"Child, child! who of us is glad with unmixed gladness, after the door has been closed on our youth and the dreams of youth?"

She slid from her perch and slipped her hand through her friend's arm.

"But to-night, beloved, we will close other doors—

the doors of the world of people. This tree shall be the last landmark; beyond this we ride over enchanted ground, and fancy all wild sweet things of our destination. You go to — to your lover, perhaps; and I — I ride to dream dreams in the open."

"But, Raquelita — "

"Never fear they will lead us too far astray, the harmless dreams," she laughed. "If they do, I shall do heavy penance; be sure of that!"

"You look like a witch, instead of a devotee, in this half-light," observed Ana. "Your eyes are like stars; and — what has wakened in you this wild mood? Is it the wilderness alone?"

"Not quite," acknowledged Raquel, demurely. "Since you will have a definite cause, I will confess, Anita mia, that it was the white, strong arms of — of — never look so frightened, dear, — of my friend the aliso tree!"

They both laughed, but Ana sat a moment by the little camp-fire and stared at her.

"That is all very well, and you have your good fun with me," she said; "but out here you are a different person from the lady of your cloisters. Yet nothing has happened to make you different — nothing, except that we are in the open."

"Nothing? O thou wise one!" mocked Raquel.

"But a star shone out, and its rays bewitch people sometimes, when it shines down into the heart until the radiance there is too great for one little bosom to hold; and it trembles to the lips, and all the eager longings of the world are understood, and one feels very, very close to one's own soul; and one feels that just beyond that star, or just beyond the bend of the trail up here, one might find it. So, let us ride hard and fast, my Anita, — I to my bewitched fancies, and you to your lover."

"And I — I thought you did not understand!" muttered Ana. "That was because never before have I seen you without the hedges of people about you. God forgive Rafael Arteaga, who has known and ridden away!"

"Hush!" said Raquel; "our outer world is on the other side of the aliso tree. That is our plaza, and this the inner court. Life itself has the same divisions: all the world may cross the plaza, but the inner court of one's own soul is the sanctuary, where only one may kneel beside us; it is the tabernacle of the heart, and no word of Church or your own will can give to anyone the key, or — Santa Maria! — take it out of the hands to which it is given by divine right!"

"Raquel, beloved!" cried Ana, in dismay, "you

are not laughing at me now. You make my heart ache with your words and your smile,— more with the smile, I think. And what you say is — is almost sacrilege. No Spanish mother teaches her daughter that the sacrament of the Church is not, above all things, binding. Those who break it are taught the sin of it."

"But I had no Spanish mother to teach me; only a priest and an old Indian woman. The nuns never spoke of the worldly ties, they were so sure I should never know them."

"But, Raquelita, you rode gladly north to Rafael; you — "

"Yes; I was more a devotee than I ever shall be again," acknowledged Raquel, with a sigh. "I remember the elated, half-dreamlike way in which I rode over those mesas to meet him. I was riding to help to guard a wonderful soul and a wonderful life for the Church. I was upheld by the conviction that God desired it. If, instead of asking me to marry a husband for the good of a soul, they had asked me to ride my horse into the sea and wait for the rising tide, and given as convincing a churchly reason, I should have ridden into the sea and waited, I suppose. It is bad for one when the dreams go, and the clear vision begins."

"But Rafael — "

"Rafael, beloved, is contented with the life of the plaza. He will always be; and — the inner court is forever this side of the aliso tree. Come! The stars are thick now, and if we have far to ride — "

Doña Ana untied the mule and the mustang.

"I think they will follow; but it is best, perhaps, to keep a rope on the mustang. I will lead him, and I have a bell I will tie later to his neck; it may help in the dark if we should go wide of the trail."

The wilder mood of Raquel in the great out-of-doors, where she became something besides the girl of the cloisters, had a sobering effect on Ana herself. A girl who would sacrifice herself through a temporary religious fervor was not one to look with favor on any sacrifice or risk for heretics. Again and again she thought of the letter to the Americano on which that message had been pencilled. She thought also of the words of friendship uttered by Padre Libertad for the same American, at the San Joaquin ranch. Was it that the latter was dead, and thus his letters accessible? Or was there a chance that the man whom Don Eduardo and his guests were to start in search of was held either by a friend or an enemy in the hills they were riding to?

She had felt sure, without hearing it put into words,

that Raquel rode from the ranch that night to avoid Mrs. Bryton. What other reason could there be? Therefore, was it fair to lead her blindfold to meet another of that heretic family, to whom she would not open her door even to please her husband? They had mounted their horses when the certainty that it was not fair came upon Ana, and she slipped from the saddle and stirred up the sulking embers of the little fire until it broke into a blaze.

"Raquel, it is no use! I must tell you before we start. The man I go to see is the friend of a heretic whom you bar out from your knowledge. The message sent me is written on a letter of Bryton's. You heard them say Señor Bryton cannot be found; and there is a chance — only a chance — that he may be in the mountain where we are going."

Raquel stared at her, and did not speak. In the flickering light Ana could see that her eyes grew large — with dread, or anger, or what? Even her lips grew pale, and she almost seemed to sway in the saddle.

"Raquelita mia, I was wrong, I know it was wrong to bring you; but oh, my beloved —"

"You — did not know — he — was here?"

"I did not think. The devil put mud where my brain should be! It is only when we are on the road it commences to trouble me; and now your words —

your— Oh, I know that of all women in California, you hate the heretics most; and now it is I who—"

"Tell me what the letter says," interrupted Raquel, who now sat erect in the saddle, rigid and white. "You said your friend was hurt and—"

"Some one is hurt; I do not know who. You can read the letter if you bend down here. Who knows? It may be his American friend."

"Mother mia! It may be, it may be!"

She covered her face with her hands, and Ana, looking at her, thought she was praying for strength to remember humanity ahead of the creeds. At last she spoke.

"Anita mia, never feel so badly about it. We did not plan this, you and I, but it happens—it happens! There is only one straight thing to do: I can ride back to San Juan when you learn the truth. If it is the Americano, the word shall go to his wife quickly. I need not see the man, but I can carry a message, and I will; God helping me to the strength, I will!"

"His wife? Santa Maria! The man has no wife. Half the girls of Los Angeles county try to marry him, but it is never any use."

"Anita!"

"How you stare at me, Raquel! You think I

mean some other American, maybe. No? I speak of Don Keith Bryton. You hate them all so; no one ever speaks of them to you; but he is not bad. He saved your Indian woman at the ranch while you slept. You did not know it all."

"Stop, and let me think," said Raquel, imperatively. "Some one has lied. Who is the fair woman with the blue eyes — the Mrs. Bryton — the Doña Angela he drove with — the —"

"She is the widow of his half-brother; that is all."

"All? Then how — why should Teresa say this thing? Yesterday I heard her say that Doña Angela made a flirtation with Rafael only to make Señor Bryton jealous. I heard it, though she did not know. Why should that be, if it is only his brother's wife?"

"Oh, God alone knows the heart of a woman, Raquel! It may be all a lie. Our people do not understand the gringo women. They look love to so many men, and mean it, perhaps, for none. But it was thought, yes, plainly said, when she first came to Los Angeles, that Keith Bryton was the one man she wanted to marry. But that is all over now; no one thinks —"

"Teresa thinks."

"Teresa had better be at her prayers! I could tell you something strange of Keith Bryton, — only you

An Inner Court.

are not interested in gringos,— something of a love of his, and I feel sure it is never the pretty Doña Angela."

"Tell me," said Raquel, coldly.

"A man — a priest — learned it from him some way. I thought the Americanos had no saints; but something like a love for a saint keeps Keith Bryton from caring much for any one else. It is as if a woman, instead of a wooden saint, should be in one of the niches of the old altar-place, and he said prayers there. Whoever she is, she seems to be very far above him — like the star he cannot reach."

"The men who cannot reach the stars content themselves with picking flowers, do they not?"

"Oh, God alone knows how they content themselves! I only tell you this thing to show you that Señor Bryton has not anywhere in the land a woman to go to him if he were dying alone in the hills; his saint would not step down from the niche of the altar-place."

"Anita mia, you forget," she said, in a strange, mocking tone. "If Keith Bryton is a friend of yours, you should wish him better fortune than to kneel at a place like our old altar. Do you forget that of the eleven niches still left in the old ruin, only one holds a saint,— a saint where no one openly kneels,— that of the Maria Madalena?"

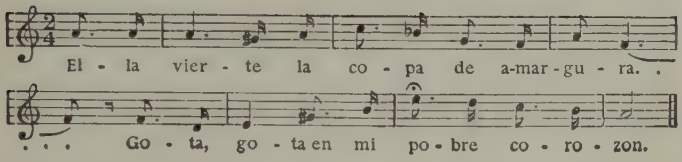
"Raquel, what things you do fancy! Now that you know whom you may have to meet, will you ride with me, or back to the road?"

"Back to the plaza?" asked Doña Raquel. "Anita mia, all this has come to me in the inner court of the aliso portal: it does not belong to the outer world; neither do we, I think, to-night. Whatever the shadows of the cañon cover for us, I think, we must ride upward to meet them. Your friend's saint, the Madalena of the niche, will watch over us. When we go back she shall have candles and roses — red ones, Anita!"

Ana was voluble in her delight, and rode up the valley with a great load lifted from her heart.

But the witching spell of the aliso portal had lost its gay charm for Raquel, or else it had sent her another more potent, for she rode in silence under the stars, without gladness, yet so steadily, so recklessly, that Ana more than once had to complain that only a deer or a coyote could keep ahead of her.

Ella No Me Ama.



CHAPTER XVII

THAT same evening a gay party from the south rode along the sea to San Juana Capistrano. Doña Maria and Don Eduardo rode in a carriage, but the Doña Angela had received riding lessons from Rafael, and disdained now the lounging ease of the cushioned seats. She and Rafael galloped far ahead at times, and then loitered idly among the odorous grasses and chaparral, and watched the waves roll in, and said the gay, foolish things that sometimes mean only courtesy, and sometimes mean the ripples of thought fringing pools of unsounded depths. There was little doubt of the quality of Rafael's thought. Whatever it had been in the commencement, there was little now within

his power to accomplish which he would not have done at the bidding of her smiling childish lips.

"If we had a boat out there where the whitecaps are, we could go even faster than the horses," she was saying. "I always wanted a boat; I always wanted to live near the ocean, if only the right people could be with me."

"You shall have a boat, any day you want it," he said, eagerly. "They make them at San Pedro; that is not far to send. A boat, and a house by the sea! Why not wish for a more difficult thing? Would you like that bluff above the river's mouth? Or Dana's Point, beyond there? You could watch the whales spouting from the quay, and all the sea and valley could be yours at a glance, and—"

"And a fine view, also, of your monastery walls, far, far away, Don Rafael."

"I should never be far away, only as far as you bid me go."

"Ah! that sounds very submissive," she replied; "but you are not really so, not really. I—I want to say to you that my cousin's wife reproves me for your—your—"

Her hesitation was very pretty. It delighted the man, who caught her hand and kissed it.

"My—my—you can find no word, madama, for

my madness; is that it?" he asked, softly. "You are right; there are no words ever coined to cover it. I make myself a carpet for your feet, mi corazon!"

"I don't want a carpet for my feet, — at least I think I do not," she said, doubtfully, "not in the face of all the frowns of California; and we perhaps go to-day where we see many frowns from my cousin. She says she may not visit your wife. Why?"

"Perhaps she does not like a home where there are endless prayers," he said, briefly; "but, such as it is, it is for you, madama. You would light up even the shadows there. As for the Doña Maria, she is — ah, well, she is old, and forgets many things. She has had her own romances, and they should teach her charity! The plans she makes in San Diego and on the road are all right for those places, but when we reach San Juan you all go to my home. I sent word ahead."

"Your wife expects us to-night?"

"She does not know what night, or what day, but she will expect you."

"She does not care at all for people, does she?" and Angela's eyes were turned from him to the sea. "All this wonderful principality of a place, and a home like a ruined castle, and the boxes of jewels they say she never looks at! She must be a marvellous woman, — the Doña Raquel Arteaga. I shall feel a

little afraid, I think, of the magnificence she disdains."

"A finer castle will go up on those bluffs when you say the word, madama mia; and the jewels — one can always find more pearls in the sea!"

"How often shall I have to tell you that you must not make those foolish promises to me? You, a married man!"

"Just so often as you make me forget the marriage — and that —"

"Adam!" she laughed. "Of course it is to be the woman's fault, — 'She tempted me!'"

She sprang to her feet and ran to her horse as the carriage came in sight over the mesa. He was by her side in an instant.

"And that, madama, is every time I hear your voice, or look in your eyes, or feel the touch of your hand! Ah, beloved!"

"If you kiss me, Don Rafael, remember I cannot go to the house of your wife!"

He released her with a groan, and stared at her as she leaned panting against her horse.

"You put a man in purgatory, madama," he said, between shut teeth. "But it must end — only Christ knows how! It must end one of these days."

He lifted her to the saddle and kept his arms about her, looking up into her face.

"Was that about the boat all a jest? Once before you spoke of a boat — and us two. Perhaps it was only your woman's way to torture a man by helping him to think of that sort of heaven! But, after all, what is all this life here to you? You care nothing for the people; you will go away somewhere, some day, and no one will ever hear of you again. What better way, after all, than the boat? It leaves no tracks; there would be all the world before us."

"Hush!" she said, with a little smile. "Who is now the tempter? You are quite mad, Don Rafael."

"God!" he muttered. "If I could only have the happiness of knowing it *was* a temptation to you!"

She smiled again, and touched her horse with the quirt; and though he caught his horse and mounted quickly, she was a considerable distance ahead of him, and perversely insisted on keeping a wide space between them, or else lagging beside the carriage for conversation with Doña Maria, whom Rafael knew she loved little.

For the rest of the ride there was no chance of a word alone with her. Only as they turned from the beach to the river valley she checked her horse for an

instant, and with a little flash of a glance toward him, she flung a kiss from the tips of her fingers to the bluffs above San Juan River.

"Adios, O castle of the air in which Love might have lived! Adios, O boat of beautiful dreams, for which there is no harbor! Don Rafael, you sing so well — could you not put the castle and the boat in a Spanish song! It would sound pretty in a love-song, and it is much too romantic for every-day life; for, after all, there is no harbor here."

He devoured her with sombre eyes of desire, and a glint of rage showing through their ardent depths.

"There will be a harbor, madama mia," he muttered. "By the God and all the saints, there will be a harbor here on the San Juan shore, and there will be an embarcodera! And the boat will — will not be a boat in a song or a dream, madama mia! I swear it, I swear it, I swear it!"

He dug his spurs viciously into his mount to emphasize the words, and the animal reared and plunged, and gave him a chance to vent his feelings somewhat, while the Doña Angela tried to laugh, and failed. A passion like that was a very masterful force, and there had been times when she dared not treat it as a jest.

The shrewd, red-faced ranchman, riding in the

carriage beside his swarthy wife, noted the little pantomime and nodded to Doña Maria.

"It is as you say, dear. It is better that Don Rafael be with his own wife. If anything should happen—"

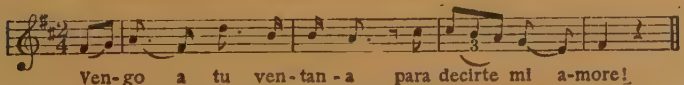
"If one thing should happen, we should be blamed; even the bishop might blame us," said Doña Maria, fretfully. "She could marry with other men: what white devil in her turns her to that mad Rafael? The Arteaga men always have their own way. She should be married."

Her husband grunted assent, and regarded the fair figure of his kinswoman riding sedately along the green. She was such a fragile, childlike creature, he thought of her as a little yellow canary, pretty to see around the home after the many years lived among the dark people; but he never was certain in the least that he knew her, and he was beginning to consider some arrangement by which, for the good of the doll-like child asleep on the carriage cushions, he could suggest that she return to the land of the Briton and abide there — with, of course, a comfortable little sum for maintenance. Don Eduardo was too much of a politician not to see the wisdom of buying off embarrassing friends; the Doña Angela in her amusements might prove not only embarrassing, but

dangerous. He had plans concerning certain Arteaga holdings, and could not have even a charming woman enter into his scheme of things, if she suggested discord. And watching Rafael Arteaga's face and the reckless passion in it, Don Eduardo decided that his fair countrywoman not only suggested discord, she was a living, breathing, alluring promise of it!

A sunset in San Juan is truly worth crossing either a continent or an ocean to witness, when the ranges toward La Paz are purple where the sage-brush is, and rose-color where the rains have washed the steep places to the clay, and over all of mesa and mountain the soft glory of golden haze. All that radiance touched the land and sea as the carriage of Don Eduardo, preceded by Rafael and Doña Angela, and followed by Fernando and Juanita, who had been a guest of Doña Maria, and back of all the rest the Indian servants and the nurse for the child on the carriage cushion. Amid the shrill calls of greeting, and gay exchange of words and laughter, the cavalcade passed the Casa Grande of Don Juan Alvara, and drew up before the portal of the great white Mission. Rafael lifted Angela Bryton from the saddle first of all, and then with his own hand opened the door of the carriage for Doña Maria.

"My house is your own, señora," he said, with the


Ven-go a tu ven-tan-a para decirte mi a-more!

debonair grace so charmingly his own. "I claim the privilege of carrying the child through the door myself. Doña Raquel will be here on the instant, and — "

The padre, pipe in mouth, had been watching the arrival from his own door, but he drew nearer, and smiled grimly at Doña Maria as he interrupted the young man.

"Not quite on the instant, Don Rafael," he remarked. "The Doña Raquel is well on her way to San Joaquin ranch with Doña Ana Mendez. They rode good horses, and they started this evening, a few minutes before my own return."

The child in Rafael's arms uttered a little cry. He had suddenly gripped her very tightly indeed, and a strange Spanish oath broke from his lips. The priest smiled, and the florid face of Don Eduardo flushed angrily.

"You — you sent Victorio Lopez — " he began, but Rafael gave him one silencing look, and stepped forward, offering his hand to Doña Maria.

"Will you honor my house by accepting it during your stay, señora?" he asked, smilingly. "My wife has not received the message that you would arrive this week. Sickness at the ranch, or some accident, has no doubt called the Doña Ana there, and Raquel would not let her go alone. But our

house and my service are at your feet. Will you enter?"

There was not a moment's hesitation on the part of Doña Maria. Let her English husband feel as he might, she meant to enter the doors where only the most exclusive had been entertained, since the day of the new chatelaine had dawned. Raquel Estevan de Arteaga was too well bred to make a scene when she returned and found them there, and Doña Maria had too much of the blood of Mexican gamblers in her veins not to be willing to take all chances when she wanted a thing very much.

As to the fact that her host and her charmingly troublesome guest would be thrown together even more than in the south, it did not trouble her in the least. Even the bishop could not blame her for what occurred in the house of Raquel Arteaga! Let that lady stay at home and guard her own husband. And if she failed, — well, it might be well to have some of that cold, Indian-like pride of hers lowered.

The Doña Angela said nothing, only smiled a little, and pretended to understand none of the Spanish spoken, but the padre, watching her wide childish blue eyes, and her rosebud of a mouth, noticed also the one quick birdlike glance she flung toward Rafael, and felt, like Doña Maria, that the stubborn pride of

Raquel Arteaga was at last to be lowered a little. She had been as an eagle swimming in the blue above all their heads, but this petite, golden-headed ladybird would sip more of honey from the blossoms of life, and touch more closely an Arteaga!

And when, after the very gay supper in the old refectory, Rafael brought a mantilla for Doña Angela, that its lacy film might protect her from the soft air of the starlight, the padre poured an extra glass of wine for the Doña Maria, the Don Eduardo, and himself, and held them in discussion. Fernando and Juanita and the other young people could go along and show the Doña Angela how beautiful were the arches and corridors after the sun was gone, but they, the older people, were content with the shelter of adobe walls after the night fell.

So they wandered forth, Fernando with a guitar, that the end of a perfect day should be celebrated in love-songs; and as he protested that they sounded better at a distance, he and Juanita strayed off into the night.

Doña Angela and Don Rafael, from a throne of sculptured stars and circles, suns and crescents,—all the Aztec symbols of light,—listened to the passion expressed in "El Tormento de Amor" floating down to them from the tiled roof of the corridors,

and later, when the doors were closed on the girls for the night, those two still listened together to the musical cadence of "Vengo à tu Ventana" sung under barred windows, and to other harmonies never written in music, but known as a compelling power to the tempestuous heart of the Mexican. Under the stars of that night, the butterfly was made to feel that the beautiful tiger she had at first paraded as a trophy was not to be laughed at,—never any more! And even when the dawn broke, she lay wide-eyed behind the iron bars of her window, wordless and frightened,—a magician who had raised a spirit stronger than her power to subdue. What a trifle it had been at first,—a mere flirtation for the sake of his handsome eyes, and now—

She told herself over and over that it was Keith Bryton's fault, and that wooden Mexican woman's fault. Why had she barred her out and raised the aggressive spirit in her? It was not in the beginning that she really meant to take her husband. And why should Keith betray his indifference in the way he did? It was so easy to show him that other men were not indifferent. And oh, the awful dismal tragedy of it! To think that by such a little, little chance she had missed being legitimate queen over this most royal domain!

"After the Very Gay Supper"

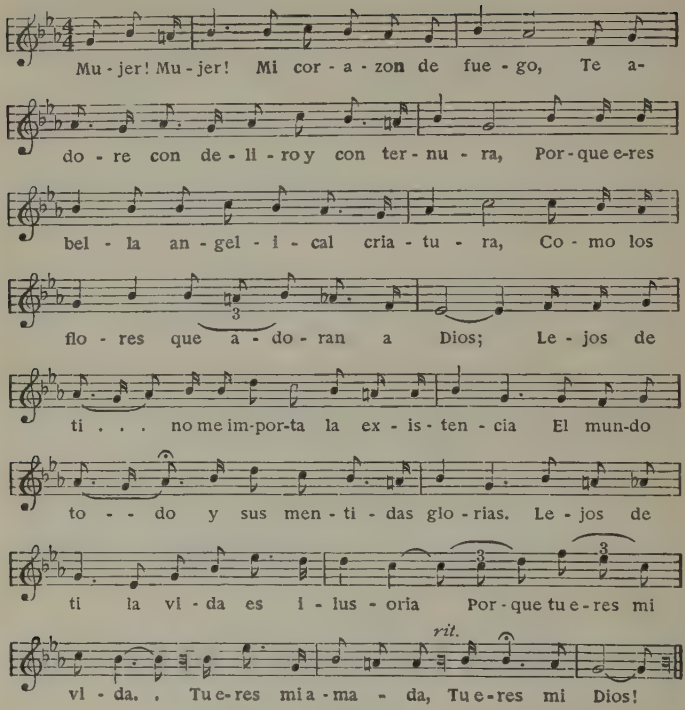
But that other woman, the Mexican, would hold it all, always! Another woman might win Rafael's smile and his love-songs, but the acres, the herds, the coin, and the jewels (he had allowed Doña Maria to show the latter to her guests that evening), all those things would be held always in the slender strong hand of Raquel Arteaga — Raquel Arteaga, who stood guard over even his soul, lest the heretics —

Then she smiled a little to herself, an involuntary smile of triumph. Had he not said in the dusk of the corridor last night that his soul was at her feet? With that battle won from the intolerant Mexican girl, were the jewels and the coin out of reach? Had he not said a boat left no track on the ocean, — the boat he had sworn to find a harbor for, — sworn to?

Of course it was only a fleeting fancy, but it drifted across her brain as a sort of solace for her fretful, feverish rebellings against the uneven division of things, and it served its purpose, for she was at last lulled into slumber by the dream, though of course it was only a dream.

But dreams, when dreamed by two, suggest such alluring possibilities!

Mi Corazon de Fuego


Mu - jer! Mu - jer! Mi cor - a - zon de fue - go, Te a-
do - re con de - li - ro y con ter - nu - ra, Por - que e-res
bel - la an - gel - i - cal cria - tu - ra, Co - mo los
flo - res que a - do - ran a Dios; Le - jos de
ti . . . no me im-por-ta la ex - is - ten - cia El mun-do
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rit.
vi - da. . Tu e-res mi a - ma - da, Tu e-res mi Dios!

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was two days later, before the sun was high, that Raquel Arteaga rode into the plaza, and, slipping from her horse, walked directly into the little private chapel and closed the door. From the other wing of the corridor Doña Maria and Doña Angela saw her, and exchanged startled glances. Their hostess had arrived, and had not even cast her eyes in their direction. They were both relieved when Rafael and Señor Downing emerged from the portal of the patio.

"Ah, she has arrived — my wife," remarked Rafael as he noticed her saddle-horse nibbling at the geraniums. "I sent an Indian messenger this morning. He has been quick; and, Santa Maria! so has she. Look at the horse!"

The animal was dripping, and as an Indian boy removed the saddle the water ran down his sides and made little pools in the dust.

"That will do him good," said Rafael. "Rub him well, and he will look like black satin. And the Doña Raquel is—"

"Your wife went to her own chapel; she saw no one," observed Doña Maria. "I should go in, but if she is at prayers—"

If she had been, her prayers were ended, for as they spoke she opened the door and came out on the corridor. She was more pale than Rafael had ever seen her, and without greeting to anyone, she spoke.

"Rafael, two men have been hurt in the mountain, a priest and—the American who was missing from the vigilantes. I think—I understand that he saved the life of the padre—and both were hurt, and—they are bringing him here."

"The American? You mean Keith Bryton?"

"Yes, I mean Keith Bryton," she said, steadily. "I rode ahead. Ana is coming with them; she thinks he is very ill—and the padre also was hurt—and—"

"Keith!" cried Doña Angela, sharply. "He is hurt—and coming here—*here?*"

"There was no place else to send them," said Raquel, quietly. "There has always been room in the Mission for the sick or wounded—and in this case—"

"That is right," exclaimed Rafael, with nervous approval; "that is all right. Where should Señor

"Their Hostess had Arrived"

Bryton go but where his friends are? This is his sister, Señora Bryton. It is well she is here; sick men need their own women folks about them. Raquelita, thou art white as the lilies in the garden! Get you some wine while I see to beds for the sick. It was lucky you and Ana chanced to meet them. When did Tomás reach you with the letter?"

She did not reply. Doña Maria was also asking questions, and telling her the Padre Andros had gone again to San Luis Rey for a week, and the three women entered the dining-room, leaving Rafael's question unanswered. He supposed that Raquel and Ana had ridden south at his bidding, and was elated that she had received the Doña Maria and her guest as she had — without gladness, of course, but without signs of displeasure. He divined there was a white devil of rage under her calm exterior, but that made no difference so long as she showed no outward sign of it. Evidently she had accepted the fact that he meant to be master; after that, life would be easier in Capistrano. He had always been a bit resentful of Keith Bryton's attitude toward himself. Never since that dictatorial letter to San Pedro had he felt easy with him, and there was no doubt whatever that Bryton had avoided him since his marriage. But he forgot all that in the satisfaction of the news Raquel brought.

With Bryton ill in the house, there was every reason why the one woman of his family should remain under the same roof indefinitely. It would mean the breaking down of barriers against heretic invaders, and so well content was Rafael over all this that he meant to nurse Keith Bryton as the most valuable friend the fates could send him. Elated with this idea, he called Don Eduardo, and together they rode out to meet them, and at sight of them wondered that even Raquel's cool exterior had not been more ruffled at the situation: she had given them no idea of what to expect.

"Your wife, in the cause of humanity, will allow dying space for a heretic," observed Don Eduardo, dryly, "but she evidently thinks them worth little attention. The man looks worse than she led us to think. We should have brought Indios and a litter to meet them."

Keith Bryton, with his head bound up so as to be almost unrecognizable, was tied on his horse and supported by the left arm of a bearded priest who rode on one side; while Doña Ana rode on the other, white-faced and tremulous, as she recognized the two men approaching.

"For the love of God, be cautious—cautious!" she whispered to the priest. And the latter drew the hood of his habit lower over his brows, to shut out the sun.

"Softly, Anita mia! From this moment I am under a vow of silence. This heretic and I have come out of the shadow of death together, he with a broken head and I with a broken arm. You can send your friends to see where three men are still unburied in the Trabuco hills. I ask of the Mission only time for silent meditation until my preserver, here, is better — or dead. I leave the words of it to you. From the moment help comes I have vowed silence. Come, come, Anita, girl. When we have blinded a woman like Raquel Arteaga for two days and nights, we need fear no eyes of men."

And it was so. The condition of the two men was warrant of Ana's recital that three refugees of Flores's bandits had assaulted the priest, with the idea that he was of the vigilantes. When the Americano, by some chance, had taken a short cut across the ranges, and, hearing shots, had gone to the rescue, he found one man with a broken arm keeping his enemies at a distance with one of their own guns. He had stumbled on their camp while they slept. For the rest, Ana asked Rafael to send some one to bury the three bodies. They were too near the trail to be left like that, and would frighten horses when one rode that way.

Of the padre, who, relieved of his burden, had

quietly fallen in the rear, Doña Ana told that he was a travelling monk from Mexico, who had been entertained at the San Joaquin ranch, and had assisted the Don Keith to quell a crazy uprising there. He was under a vow of silence from the moment God sent help; and—and of course there was room for him at the Mission, not with the crusty old Padre Andros, but if Rafael and Raquel would allow him a private corner, undisturbed! He did not appear to be the sort of man for Padre Andros's game-cocks and monte games.

Rafael, glancing at the sallow, bearded face under the monk's hood, decided that she was right. The padre looked like a man given to vigils and fasts, one living the life of renunciation such as one heard of from the older records of the valley, before the secular priests had been let loose upon the land to fatten, while the parish drifted from faith.

"Padre Andros has been called to San Luis Rey; it will be a week until he returns. This man—what is his name? Libertad? That is very Mexican. Well, the Mission is his; he can pray where he chooses. God send he prays Don Keith well again. Santa Maria! but he has a fever! Does he know one?"

Ana shook her head. He certainly did not know

her, and he did not know the padre, and she felt a hesitation in telling him that the only one whose voice or hand quieted the occasional ravings of the American was that of his own wife. If she had done so, Rafael would have only thought it a great joke on Raquel, who avoided heretics. All the hours of the days and nights in the hills, Raquel Arteaga had moved like a woman in a dream, walking alone when she was not praying beside Keith Bryton's couch of pine boughs. While Ana slept the sleep of exhaustion that first night, the silent priest had gone again and again to see Bryton and hear if there was aught to do, and each time that girl was crouching there, white-faced as a spirit in the light of the waning moon, while the man on the couch moaned "Espiritu! Doña Espiritu mia!"

That was the one moan he had made since the fever had struck him, and there had been no way of quieting him. But that night, when the moans grew into cries, the silent priest saw the girl listen until she could bear it no longer, and then she went closer to him and knelt there, her hands clasped tightly behind her, and in them the golden beads of a rosary shone against her black dress.

"I am here, close beside you," she said, lowly, "always beside you in spirit — always!"

"Espiritu mia!" he muttered, and then with a great sigh of relief sank into slumber.

The priest watched the girl to see what manner of woman might be this daughter of a nun, whose father had been the gay, lawless, debonair Felipe Estevan, of whom wild stories had been told in the old days. When had he ever resisted a love appealing? The man watching her knew the girls of Mexican California too well to doubt what the result would be: the lover first, and the rosary and the prayers afterwards.

But the night waned, and the pale moon, facing the morning star, saw her still crouching there against the tree trunk. Ana thought she slept, but her husband's enemy, who had watched her through the night, knew better. He drew Ana aside, and gave her warning.

"Tell Felipe Estevan's daughter nothing. I am the priest; that is all. She is not the woman to think this justified," and he touched the monk's robe. "This night I heard her prayers when she thought no one listened; and, Anita, girl, forget all crazy things I said about Rafael's wife helping me to revenge."

"You said nothing about Rafael's wife," and Ana faced him with startled eyes. "You said — what was it you said? Oh, that Keith Bryton should help you

— Keith Bryton, and his love for a woman who was a saint."

As she spoke, the full meaning of his words burst upon her, and she uttered a low cry of dismay.

"Barto! Holy God!—*Barto!*" she whispered.

But he caught her wrist, and his voice had a note of command in it.

"Silence! She may hear you. Forget the fool things I said there at the San Joaquin ranch. I thought I knew something of Keith Bryton, but I was mistaken. I thought I knew much of woman, but one girl at her prayers last night changed all that. We will nurse him well again, if your friends do not murder me, and then I will get him away. Some day when you and I have left all this behind us, I may tell you what I thought I knew, but not now."

"But Raquel—"

"Raquel will always be first of all the wife of Rafael Arteaga; after that she may show kindness to other human things, even the heretics. But this one heretic we will take the care of off her hands all that we can, Anita. She is not the girl to drag into a man's schemes of revenge."

"I think she bewitches you each time she comes near you," flashed Ana, resentfully. "On all other things you talk to me sense, but when it is Raquel,

my one friend, you talk riddles always, and you make me feel as if I were walking beside her in the dark or blindfold. What is it you mean? That Bryton thinks of her? How could that be, when they have not met? She thought until last night that he was married, so little interest in him has she. How do you get such crazy things in your head?"

"That is true. I find they are crazy things; I confess it to you, and ask you to give no heed to my mistakes."

"It was a mistake, then, that he cared?" persisted Ana. "You were so sure—"

"It was another woman," broke in the priest, curtly. "Oh yes, there was a woman; but I was the fool when I thought I knew who the woman was; that is all."

"And Raquel is not—"

"Raquel Estevan de Arteaga is a woman men should cross themselves when they mention," he said, quietly. "She has a strength in her that is of God or the devil; she brings it from her Indian hills of Mexico, and I for one will be on the safe side and treat it with respect."

"She has bewitched you, that is all," declared Ana; but the man in the priest's robe drew her behind a giant aliso tree and kissed her on the mouth.

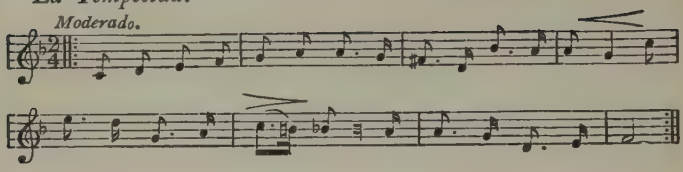
"Perhaps so," he agreed; "but, my Anita, it is only enough to make me pity the man she would bewitch in a different way. God! If he knew that she cared like that, his life would be a hell."

"Why not a heaven?" asked Ana, turning to the care of the breakfast. "Raquel spoke beautifully of a love like that last night, — a love in the inner court of life, in sanctuary, where only one other soul could kneel beside one; it was a love spiritual only."

"Only!" said the man, glancing toward the girlish figure in the serape curled against the white bark of the tree. "Only! Anita, girl, let us get the breakfast and leave love to people who have not a price set against their heads. As for that love of the inner court of life, the sanctuary, Raquel still dreams the dreams of a nun. Men and women of California are of flesh and blood, and they do not love in that way."

La Tempestad.

Moderado.



CHAPTER XIX

THREE days later, Keith Bryton opened his eyes within the white walls of a little room in the Mission. The wooden shutters of the barred window were open, and all was still. A meadow-lark called somewhere without, and he could hear down the valley the beat of the surf against the cliffs. A bearded priest sat in the window reading a book, and a woman coming from the dining-room through the quaint old Moorish doorway stopped suddenly with a quick-caught breath of fear as his eyes opened at the rustle of her dress, and he smiled at her with a great sigh of relief.

"Doña Espiritu!" he murmured. "I knew you would come if I waited. Such a bad dream has been with me! I thought I was back in California, and

you — ah! there were higher barriers around you than the convent walls, and —"

Doña Raquel stood motionless, with the little earthen olla of spring water in her two hands. Her face grew white, and she glanced at the man in the window-seat. He raised a finger of warning to his lips, and arose and came forward.

"You must not talk, Don Keith," he said, quietly. "One cup of water, since the lady brings it to you, and then to sleep again. Sleep is best."

"You were of the dream, too," muttered Bryton, fretfully, "the bad dream. Espiritu mia! tell me it is not true. I cannot think; my head —"

"Tell him, Doña Espiritu," said the man with the book. Then he gave her a glance of warning and touched his temple significantly. She crossed the room and placed the water beside him.

"What shall I tell you, Don Keith?" she asked, softly. "I am sorry you have been so ill and the bad dreams have come. This is Padre Libertad; he has nursed you very well. We must all obey him and let you sleep."

"But not to dream again," he protested. "Be kind, as you were in the hills of the temple, — give me your hand again, — then I will sleep without the hell of dreams."

At the command of the padre, she obeyed, and he took her one hand in both of his and drew it across his lips. A shudder passed over her at his touch, and she rested her other hand against the whitewashed wall for support.

"Courage, my daughter," said the man with the book, gently; and the man on the bed looked at him and smiled.

"Courage?" he said. "You should have seen her when she faced that mob of Indians and saved us. We had not meant to spy on their ceremonies, and we paid dearly for getting lost in the wilderness. Still, it was worth it, Doña mia! It was worth going through it all, even the hell of dreams, to find you again like this, and your hand in mine."

She did not speak, only turned imploring eyes on the padre.

"You need not mind him," continued Bryton. "I like him better than the old padre, and he shall marry us when I come back. Now I can go to sleep."

He held her hand in his, and when she tried to draw it away, he smiled with closed eyes, and whispered, "You remember how we watched all the stars cross the sky? And then the morning star, the star of the Holy Spirit, that was yours, Doña mia; and then — then — you remember all — all of our one night?"

"All of it—always!"

He smiled with his eyes still closed, and released her hand, and did not see her as she swayed toward the door and was caught in the strong arms of the man she called Padre Libertad. When she knew where she was again, she found her face and hair wet with cold water, and all the women about with cordials and cures.

"It is a fever; she will get it next," prophesied Doña Maria. "A woman who neither eats nor sleeps gets ready for the graveyard."

But Raquel waved aside all their cures and sent for Padre Libertad.

"You broke your vow of silence there just now for him," she said, abruptly. "Break it now for me. You know?"

"God help you, Raquel Estevan! I know. No one else ever shall, and whatever you want done shall be done."

"God help me, indeed!" Raquel moaned. "To the soul of Rafael I am bound all the days of my life. I want nothing done. I dare want nothing."

Raquel went no more into the room where Keith Bryton awoke to a hold on life and reason,—that was the one thing perplexing to the man in the priest's gown;

and not even Ana was allowed to hear the constant demands for Doña Espiritu, or the girl of the temple, or the lady who had led him out of the wilderness under the light of the morning star! All those things would have seemed like maddest ravings to any but Padre Libertad, who carefully excluded all visitors from the room, despite the protests of Doña Angela, who claimed the privilege of relationship, — a claim denied by a shake of the head of the silent, book-reading padre.

Raquel moved almost as silently about the corridors of the Mission, serene, quiet, and busy, always busy with the entertainment of her numerous guests. The people of the country rode on any pretext to San Juan in those days, to meet the Downings and talk by the hour in the cool shadows of the patio concerning the tragedies of the bandits. The beautiful old Mission town had gained a new sort of fame through them.

Rafael arranged barbecues and picnics to the cañons, where the wild-rose thickets were yet odorous with bloom. Even a dance was arranged by some of the gentlemen in the old wing of the Mission, called the travellers' room, — a Spanish dance at which only those wearing the old Spanish costumes dared keep time to the music, and the Mexican serape was discarded for the velvet cloak or cape of grander days.

"And—He was an Arteaga!"

The younger men rode fifty miles for costumes. Don Juan Alvara, who still wore knee-breeches, stockings, and buckled shoes, had promised to go to bed earlier that night because of the demand on his wardrobe. Raquel delved in old chests of Doña Luisa Arteaga's belongings, and brought out treasures of embroideries and brocades enough to turn the heart of Angela Bryton bitter with envy. She knew Raquel would look a barbaric queen in the jewelled bodices where topazes formed the hearts of yellow roses, or real pearl-embroidered lilies, and in laces — laces to wrap her like a mummy, leaving only those great violet eyes of hers visible to gaze in that serene haughty way at one, and through one!

But once having been forced by circumstances to take the hand of a guest in hers, Raquel Arteaga raised no material barriers to hospitality.

"They are at your pleasure, Señora Bryton," she said, graciously. "After you have selected what you would like, Carmella and Juanita may care for some of them. The white brocade of the lilies would become you. There is a white mantilla of lace to go with it, and pearls — plenty of pearls."

Doña Maria and Teresa Arteaga exchanged glances. They had never objected to the favorites of their husbands, — no good wife did, — but even the most

devoted of Mexican wives had never opened her jewel-box for her rival.

However, they decided in confidence that Raquel had appeared strange and indifferent since the day of the fainting spell. She was more kind and gentle, if anything, to Rafael himself, even tender in little cares for his comfort, as his own mother might have been. But beyond the tender, conciliating, half-maternal attitude toward her husband, she walked as in a dream of indifference toward the rest of the world. Full of care as a hostess, she yet spent no moment alone with any guest except the silent padre, who paced the corridors, his eyes on a book, and always on guard at the door of the American, who had almost given his life that an unknown priest might live.

Rafael himself did not understand Raquel's gentle, devoted attitude. Once, as he smoked in the corridor facing the sea and commented aloud on the charms of a pretty girl who crossed the plaza, some man, standing there, took up the subject and spoke of his wife — Rafael's — and the lucky fellow he was to get her, — that girl of the South with her strange, alluring beauty not to be defined, but so surely felt by all who had the happiness to meet her. As Rafael listened, he, for a moment, felt again a delight in the barbaric sense of possession of her. It was true; she

was of strange beauty, and he knew every man envied him. The thought of it brought back the remembrance of the fitful passion she had aroused in him there in Mexico, where the bars of the convent had made more keen his desire for victory. Some echo of that fitful passion sent him from the man in the plaza to the door of her room. It was not love; but she was his, and — he was an Arteaga!

The shadowy room was lit by the soft glow of candles on the altar of the Virgin. She had knelt there until some wave of feeling swept over her, leaving her prostrate at the feet of the serene, tender, changeless Mother of Sorrows. For a moment he halted, but the brandy he had been drinking was of the best. The Doña Angela had gone bathing with the others on the beach, while he had been kept in the town by some business, and a man must console himself. He remembered that he had won this girl, whom others found beautiful, from one altar there in the South; it gave a certain zest to his present determination. A woman could pray at any time; but just now — well, she should remember she was his!

What he said he did not clearly remember afterwards; but he was strong, and he had been silent, and she was gathered in his arms and lifted to her feet, and he was seeking her lips with his, when, with a cry

that was terrible in its smothered rage, she wrenched herself free and darted to the table where the jewel-box lay open, and on the top of strings of pearls shone the glittering steel of a dagger. What she said to him turned him, sullen and cowed, toward the door. But there she stopped him.

"Your child, and the mother of it there in the willows, are my care, Rafael Arteaga, as they would have been the care of your mother, had she lived. I have sworn to that dying mother to live beside you, and guard you from what harm I can, but if you still take your marriage vows to the willows, you put aside the sacrament of your marriage to me. Never again, while you choose to live like that, must you cross to me where this altar is. I guard your soul for your mother, but by the Virgin, and by this cross on the dagger, I will send you to account there where she is, if you come to me like that again! I give my life to keep my vow; but if you drive me to it, my soul may yet have to pay in the other life for the loss of your own!"

As he stumbled out of the door he met the Padre Libertad pacing the corridor, as usual, with his book. He did not lift his eyes or speak, and Rafael passed on sullenly, muttering an oath: each way he turned in the Mission he met an altar or a priest!

Ana, coming through the portal of the inner court,

met him there, and heard the oath, and was filled with fear of a discovery so appalling that her woman's wit left her, and she blundered and caught his arm and questioned.

"But, Rafael, he has done nothing. That he was at the door of Raquel is not—"

"Sure, it is not," he agreed, scoffingly. "But when a man has a wife of his own,—even Raquel Estevan de Arteaga,—he does not want a black gown and a monk's cowl forever as her shadow."

They were outside the window of Keith Bryton, and the words reached the ears of the man on the bed there, and brought him reeling but determined to his feet.

It was the first word reaching him by which he could grasp at the reality of the life about him; all the vague dreams were dashed aside by that name, "Raquel Estevan de Arteaga." It cleared the visions of the fever his nurse had feared to dispel too quickly, and in one staggering flash he saw the truth: the "dream" of the California life was no dream, it was the real life to be met and fought again. Where was he, that the voice of Rafael Arteaga dared ring with such imperious directions? He reached the barred window dizzily and leaned his head against the high ledge. The world whirled about him for a moment,

and when it stopped and stood still, he again heard the voice of Rafael, irritated this time into more intolerant speech by some eager protest of Ana.

"Oh, ho! That is the man, is it? And he saved her from Juan Flores that night? That is news — God curse him!"

"Rafael!" and the woman's voice was full of horror. "You are crazy with brandy; you do not know how you speak. Go to your bed and sleep. That man saved your name and your wife from disgrace, and you have only curses for him in your mouth!"

"Basta! He may win seven heavens for aught I care. But, name of God! sing no praises of him for saving Raquel Estevan for me! She is not a woman, Anita! Never a woman for a man who wants a wife. By God, I think she is the devil turned saint; and the man who carries her to the hills is my friend and earns a herd of horses!"

"Santa Maria! You are mad over that other woman, Rafael Arteaga. Every one sees it but Raquel; and when she does see it —"

"She! she sees nothing but her saints on the altar! She has only the heart of a nun in that white breast of hers. Don't you put your devil of a tongue in this business, Ana Mendez, or —"

"You are drunk, Rafael," said Ana, untouched by

the personal remark. "You are drunk. Go to bed."

No other words came to the ears of Keith Bryton. He heard the departing steps, and the rustle of Ana's silken gown on the tiling, and then someway he found himself back in the bed, with all the cobwebs cleared from his brain. He knew where he was now — in a room of the Mission, where he had not dared set a foot since the day when he heard her vow made to the dying woman. He was in her home, then, the home of her husband. And that silent padre who had shielded him from knowing it — what did his devoted guardianship mean? What did it mean that he had approved that once she had come there and stood by the bed with her hands in his? That she had listened to his words, and — Or was that also a fancy born of the fever?

But when the silent padre came in and closed the door, and heard the direct rapid questions, the replies were just as direct. Padre Libertad observed that the shock of the truth had come, and there was no reason for further illusion. The American was weak, but alert to all the padre told him; and he told him all the truth.

"So you see, Señor Bryton, you saved my life, and there is a good price set against it. I am here in the

home of my cousin, who will make a fiesta of the day I am hung or shot. You know it, and the girl I love knows it. It has been a good place to hide: they think me in Mexico. I start there to-night, unless you — "

"Wait: to-morrow I can perhaps go with you. God! To think I have been helpless here in his home!"

The other man said nothing, only watched him with the dark velvety eyes full now of the spirit of comradeship.

"It is strange it should be you I trust," he said, at last. "I remember days when I planned which way I would have you killed when my men found you. You saved the government their horses last year. I shot at you once as you rode from Santa Ana ranch."

"Was that you?" observed the other. "Yes, I remember." Then, after another silence, he asked with careful indifference:

"Doña Raquel Arteaga — she was in here, and I said things I — well — you heard! Does she know the truth about you?"

"Not even does she suspect. No one here has ever seen me since this beard is over my face. I pass the men on the plaza who hunted me with hounds and guns to the water's edge a year ago, and they bow

their heads and lower their voices not to disturb my devotions. Madre de Dios! it has been great sport, but for the thought of — of a woman whose heart has been shown to me as a priest! The thing I have done is a sacrilege, and Father Andros would scorch me well for it — but I would rather burn than have her ever know the truth — I who am the lover of another woman!"

Keith Bryton reached out his hand to the outlaw, and there were no more words spoken between them of the matter.

Later Doña Angela returned, and hearing from Ana that Bryton was again conscious of his whereabouts, insisted on seeing him; and this time the silent padre of the prayers offered no protest, only sat in the window-seat, and did not lift his eyes, and listened.

"I've been wild — just that, Keith, ever since they brought you back. Who? oh, Doña Raquel and Ana, and, of course, the padre. My! You looked awful. I'm glad you are better. There is to be a really great Spanish dance, and I should have hated to go unless you were out of danger. They would not allow me inside this door before, and I — Keith, there are a thousand things I want to say to you, and —"

The priest arose and made a quiet movement toward the door. The interview was evidently terminated. Keith had not had a chance to say anything, and Doña Angela whisked out of the room in a temper. She sought Rafael, but could not find him, for the reason that he had taken Ana's advice and tumbled into bed. She finally found Ana and Raquel in the dining-room, and smiled tolerantly at the fact that the latter, covered with a great apron of linen, was attending personally to the moulding of candles, and not a servant, not even Ana, was allowed to help.

The days of Doña Angela's stay had brought her face to face with many self-satisfying little scenes of that sort. Remembering that first meeting of the two as strangers, it was comforting to Angela to be able to look down in some way on the wife of Rafael Arteaga; and since she chose to make of herself a servant — It seemed so incredible to the woman who had never, never, had all she wanted of luxury, that this other girl, young, and many said handsome, had not the natural woman's vanity for decking herself with the gorgeous things stacked in those old chests. To her it seemed a warrant to Rafael to seek companionship elsewhere. A woman who could claim a throne lessened her value by stooping to the cares of the kitchen. It argued low tastes;

it emphasized the uneven division of things. It was a constant reminder to Angela Bryton that she, the woman who appreciated it all, who would have held a half-regal Court of Love in the old walls where only endless prayers were whispered,—she was the woman to whom it should belong by right. For her, Rafael Arteage would have spread carpets of velvet on the tiled floors and cast himself, happy, at her feet.

All these thoughts had given her a sort of insolent courage to comment on the girl who trod the Mission-made bricks, and whose eyes looked out so often over one's head.

"Of all the Indian servants, have you none trained in so laborious a task as this?" she asked, sinking into one of the rawhide-seated chairs at the table. "It is horrid work. I wonder you spoil your hands."

Ana flashed a glance of resentment at the languid blossom of a woman, always a shimmer of lacy ruffles, a picture of alluring, half-childish helplessness. It was for such a white kitten Rafael was losing all his sense.

"I should be proud to use my hands for the same work, instead of this endless embroidery," she observed; "but Doña Raquel will not hear of it."

"To mould the candles for the altar, each woman of each house should make her own," returned

Raquel, quietly. "You have not that custom in your land — no?"

"Certainly not. We are not taught that extra pounds of beef tallow will help to save our souls if burned in silver holders."

"No? What, then, does it take to save souls in your country?"

"Those who come here leave their souls at home for safe-keeping," declared Ana, thrusting her needle viciously into the embroideries of lawn; "they only bring their long purses to be filled."

For one moment the snapping black eyes of Ana met the childish blue ones of Angela and carried in their glance an accusation and understanding. Angela's pretty teeth closed with a vicious click under her red lips, then she shrugged her dimpled shoulders, and laughed.

"Oh, you see of course only the merchants here," she conceded, "the people who buy hides, and tallow, and herds of horses."

Then she turned again to Raquel, who had seen some of the little byplay.

"And those candles of purest white, packed in scented cotton, for what especial purpose are they reserved?"

"They are the candles for the dead."

Angela shuddered, as with a passing chill.

"How constantly you people keep before you

remembrance of the tomb!" she exclaimed. "One needs to get out in the sun often to remember that the old Mission is not really a vault."

"It is," said Ana; "there are padres of the old days buried under some of the floors."

"How perfectly horrid! And you make all those dozens of immaculate candles to be used for whoever comes first," she continued, addressing herself to Raquel, with a slight smile of disdain as at a childish pastime; "and they are all duly blessed, I suppose, and duly insured to light the souls from the path of the inferno."

For the first time Raquel perceived the touch of malice under the smiling query.

"You are right," she said, quietly; "those are of the first I ever made with my own hands here in San Juan Capistrano. Padre Sanchez bestowed on them his blessing, and the thought of so holy a man is in itself a blessing."

"But think," persisted the soft little malicious tones, "is it not often the story of the pearls and the swine? Any sodden drunken Indian beast is likely to be laid in state with those emblems of purity burning in his honor."

Raquel paused with the last handful of them, and the violet eyes, dark with indignation, met the blue ones.

"That is true," she said, coldly. "We are taught that souls are all alike before God. These in my hand may be lit for any one — for a sodden beast that dies in sin, for a murderer, for me perhaps, or it may be they burn even for you, señora!"

"Ugh! how ghastly!" The blue eyes wavered, and she arose with a little shiver. "But I don't think I would want them, really," she added, as she was leaving the room, "any more than I would want masses said if I should go under a breaker some day when bathing, and never come up again. The fashion of the living praying for the dead seems a bit incongruous and amusing. Save the candles for those of the faith, Doña Raquel."

Her little mocking laugh made more pointed her intention of ridicule. The face of Raquel was still and expressionless, as she slowly placed the last of the candles in the perfumed box and closed the lid. Ana flung down her embroidery, and said to Raquel, with blazing eyes:

"Raquelita! Some day I shall choke that pretty little white devil, you will see! How and why we endure her mocking I don't know. That she is of Keith Bryton's family is something, but it is not enough. When he is able I shall tell him some things — I shall tell Don Eduardo things! She makes

a mock of our women, and I keep quiet; she makes her love to your husband, and I say nothing; but, Raquel, she makes mockery of your religion in your own house. Can you stand that too?"

Raquel put her hands over her eyes an instant in a tired way.

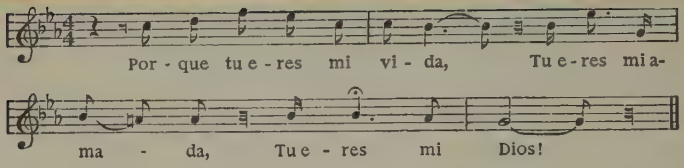
"Quiet, you, Anita mia," she said after a little. "Words are not so much use. They will go away soon now — after the dance to-morrow night. And I do not think it is true of Rafael. He is her caballero, as he would be yours or Juanita's; that is all. There is that other woman in the willows. She —"

"Raquelita, how little you know men! Pretty Marta by the river is only a servant; but our men go mad for these white women of blue eyes — mad!"

"A few days more, and that will be forgotten as he would forget the brown girls. Have patience. At least, she will not mock our religion to him; and the rest — it is only one day and two nights more, Anita, and you will help me."

"At least you will find a way to keep those pearls from her," insisted Ana, stubbornly. "How could you offer them to her? Oh, I could have screamed at you!"

"The pearls are but a trifle to let go for a night, dear. Help me with the candles to the altar-place. Oh, yes, she may have the pearls."



CHAPTER XX

ANGELA BRYTON sought until she found Rafael asleep in a corner of the travellers' room.

"Ana Mendez knows; she has told your wife," she said, abruptly. "Two nights and a day we have; that is all. Raquel says I am not more to you than a brown girl in the willows. You make her pay for that!"

"Pay?" He rubbed the sleep of the brandy from his eyes and sat up, then caught her to him in the instinct of possession.

Quickly she drew aside and eluded him.

"Not yet," she said, with the glint of steel in her eyes. "Not until you make her pride pay, Rafael mio! She tosses a string of pearls to me as a queen would to a waiting-maid, to show how trifling

a thing it is to her. One string! Rafael, where now is that boat?"

"The boat?" He stumbled to his feet and stared at her.

"The boat! You said it. Not even my hand shall you touch until it is in the harbor. Cousin Eduardo and Keith Bryton will send me away when she tells them; they will never let you see me again."

"Huh!" He flung back his head contemptuously. He had never quite gotten away from Teresa's conviction that Keith Bryton's impatience with Angela was born of jealousy. So it was Keith Bryton again!

"He gets you when he has killed me, not sooner," he muttered. "And they all know, eh? How is that?"

"Perhaps not, but they will. It is that Mendez woman and your wife! I will *not* be sent like a pauper back to England! Cousin Edward spoke yesterday of that; of an allowance for Dolly and me. Now I know what it means! If I go, I will go in a manner they don't dream of,—alone in that boat! You can join me anywhere you say, on the coast. How you stare! It is not so difficult, and there will never, never, never be any other way we can be together."

"That is true; we will go."

"You want all the coin; you want the jewels; you want—"

"I want only you," he said.

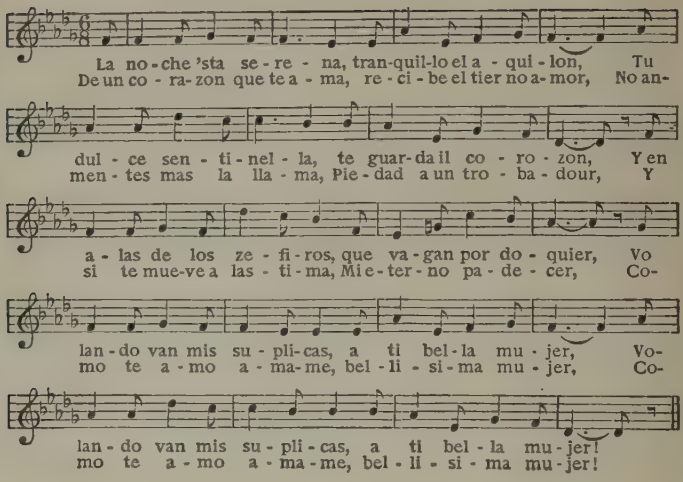
"If you want me, you must give me what I ask. Those women must not—"

"To hell with the women! We will go, and no one need guess we have gone together. I will send Victorio with a letter to San Pedro for a boat. Your lips for that promise!"

"When the boat is in the harbor, and the jewels in my hand, Rafael," she replied, and darted like a bird through the door, and out into the garden. Later she came into the refectory with an armful of lilies,—symbols of innocence,—and asked Ana for an olla for them, and was very demure and sweetly appealing for the rest of the day.

"Each Way He Turned He Met an Altar or a Priest"

La Noche esta Serena.


La no-che 'sta se-re-na, tran-quil-lo el a-qui-lon, Tu
De un co-ra-zon que te a-ma, re-ci-be el tier no a-mor, No an-
dul-ce sen-ti-nel-la, te guar-da il co-ro-zon, Y en
men-tes mas la lla-ma, Pie-dad a un tro-ba-dour, Y
a-las de los ze-fi-ros, que va-gan por do-quier, Vo
si te mue-ve a las-ti-ma, Mi e-ter-no pa-de-cer, Co-
lan-do van mis su-pli-cas, a ti bel-la mu-jer, Vo-
mo te a-mo a-ma-me, bel-li-si-ma mu-jer, Co-
lan-do van mis su-pli-cas, a ti bel-la mu-jer!
mo te a-mo a-ma-me, bel-li-si-ma mu-jer!

CHAPTER XXI

WHAT Padre Libertad saw or heard he did not particularize. But when Keith Bryton, the day of the Spanish dance, had arisen and dressed, and talked a little with all those known to him in the Mission, except the mistress of it, the bearded priest closed the door on them all, and came and sat beside him.

"To-morrow, my friend, we go," he said.

"Can I — will she speak to me — once?"

"What is there to say to a woman like that? God! To think that such a one should be Rafael Arteaga's wife!"

"No," agreed the other; "there is nothing to be said. Only I would like to see her face once, even though she should not know it. Could that be?"

"It is not wise; it sends you away with more of a heartache; but there is one place she goes each evening as the stars come out. There is one saint

left in one niche of the old ruin. Since she rode with us from the hills, flowers are always there, and she goes from her own chapel there — to pray, perhaps. She has not said so, but — "

"I can see her there. Will you — will you try to manage that no one else comes? Oh, it will be brief enough, even if we speak. But the statue in the niche — I can't remember."

"It is in the shadow. The draperies of red are very faded, and so is the gilt of the embroideries now. Once it was very gorgeous, and it is called Maria Madalena."

Keith turned on the speaker with flaming eyes.

"She kneels there to pray — *she?* What mad fanaticism is that? Good God, man! *she* is the soul of innocence!"

"What she knows of her own heart, she knows, my friend. This is not the thing to tell a man who is to her what you are; but there is — there may be some day, a thing that will leave her free; and if it come — "

Keith had covered his face with his hands. The weakness of the illness was still on him; he durst not leave his eyes unguarded. But after a little he looked up.

"You know something more?" he said.

"I know there is another woman who has Rafael tied hand and foot; I know she will take him away; the only thing I do not know is how long it will last. The bishop himself would help such a separation."

"God himself could not," said Keith, "unless he kill Rafael Arteaga. When I heard what he said of her outside the window, I was tempted to kill him with my own hand. Nothing else would free her; I heard the oath she took!"

"To send to eternity the soul she is vowed to guard would not free her from the idea. If he should die suddenly, unshriven, it is a lost soul, just the same."

"It is the maddest fanaticism to bind a child like that to such a hell; and she accepts it, as—as her people in the past accepted the order for sacrifices."

"What do you know of her people?"

"What do you?"

The two men looked into each other's eyes for a moment, and then Padre Libertad spoke:

"I saw her mother years ago in Mexico. I was only a boy, and I adored Estevan. I carried letters for their love-making. That helps me to understand their daughter. It is true; it is in the blood, and you must go, my friend, before worse happens. And if ever she should be free—"

Keith put out his hand.

"Don't tempt me with a hope like that! I want to be sane when I do see her!"

He saw Doña Angela first, a delightful vision of brocades and white mantilla. She had dressed early, that she might help to receive the guests.

She flinched a little under his keen glance as his eyes wandered from the pearl-trimmed bodice to the fair face.

"Oh, of course it is not mourning," she exclaimed, "if that is what you are thinking of! But at least I wear no color, and it is only for one night. I have not the least intention of dancing. The whole affair is only to show off the old costumes."

"You succeed very well," he remarked. "Let Dolly come around to see me when she has had supper. I leave early in the morning, and can't see her then to say good-bye."

"So soon—going?" She tried to keep the delight from her tone of surprise. He was the most unmanageable man she had ever known. His indifference had attracted her, even infatuated her, a year ago, but there were days since when she thought she hated him. "Yes, I will send Dolly. She loves you dearly, more even than she did poor Ted."

"We will not discuss my brother," he said, coldly.

"But that will not prevent me caring for the child as he would have done."

"Irrespective of her mother?" she asked, halting in the door and looking over her shoulder at him.

"Certainly."

"Or — or of anything I might offend you in?"

"Nothing you choose to do will affect my promise to my brother," he said, impatient at her persistence.

"I may remind you of that some day," she said, gathering up her brocades. "If you do go, I hope that ghoul of a man, your padre, goes too. His silence makes him more like a spook than a man. The people have a holy horror of his piety."

After she had disappeared, Padre Libertad entered from an inner room and smiled grimly at Bryton.

"You are the sort of lover to be unhappy," he observed. "You can't console yourself with the other women. Half the men in the valley are mad over that woman, who would coquette with you if you did not turn ice when she comes near."

Keith stared out of the window toward the hills of the sea, tinged with the warm rose of the sunset. And the man in a priest's robe tried to laugh, and ended with a sigh.

"I admire your strength, though I doubt if I

could emulate it," he confessed. "One pretty woman in sight is worth a dozen goddesses over the hill."

"Talk sense if you can!"

"I can. I shall leave to-night instead of to-morrow. I find I can go to Mexico, or South America if I choose, without touching land. I shall be running away with the property of a relative, and you might not care to mix up with it."

"An hour ago you had no such plan."

"An hour ago I had not confessed Victorio Lopez! I know an old record of his, and he thinks it is witchcraft. There is a lot of coin going along, — a matter of several rawhide sacks of it, — but it will be donated by a man who can afford gifts. Let me have your address two months ahead, and I can tell you how it all turns out."

"You should be glad to get away alive, without weighting yourself with coin. There is a woman here who would care if things went entirely wrong."

"Ana? It is for her I take the chance. I know a corner down the coast where fifty thousand will last forever. She is free, and she is of California — no snow of the hills in her blood! She will come to me after the chase is over."

"She knows?"

"Not yet. Women's fears upset things sometimes.

If I do not tell her, it will be better. I need only tell that I am going; she is waiting eagerly for that."

"And Victorio Lopez?"

"He is paralyzed by the fear that I may give some old proofs of things to the alcalde. Oh, Victorio is all right. He knows two Indian sailors who will say nothing. They need to get away, and want a chance. We will bind and gag the others and put them ashore. It is all settled. The saints be thanked that I know boats and the coast!"

Bryton scarcely knew whether to think the plan a wild fancy or an actual fact. The whole scheme of life those days was so filled with the strange and tragic, that all the echoes of laughter and the tinkle of guitars in the corridors could not even temper it.

At sunset Rafael Arteaga rode a dripping horse into the plaza, and shouted cordial responses to the chorus of greetings awaiting him. All the day he had been in the saddle. "On business," was the only explanation to Don Eduardo and Doña Maria. To his wife he had offered none, nor spoken since the scene in the chapel. But he was in high good spirits, gay and eager.

He came direct to Bryton's room with a fine air of delight that he was on his feet again. Even to Padre Libertad, whom he had so fervently cursed the day before, he was at last gracious. When told by Ana

that the padre was on his journey south either at once or early in the morning, he gave her some gold pieces to bestow upon him for his church or his order: priests always had all sorts of ways to use money. Padre Libertad accepted the alms gratefully, and exchanged for them a blessing.

The sun was gone, and men, and women too, were riding in from outlying ranches. The Indians and Mexicans were trooping to the plaza to watch the gay caballeros and dark-eyed ladies in the dresses of their grandparents. Raquel Arteaga, dressed in simple black, with white undersleeves and white chemisette of silk, stood in the corridor for a while and greeted her earlier guests, while her husband dressed. All the people were on the west side of the plaza, where the dancing was to be. Bryton could see her there surrounded by the gay people, almost nunlike with the strings of black pearls around her throat as sole ornament, and in the braids of her hair the white stars of the odorous jasmine, thrust there by Ana, to break the severity of her garb. Her eyes burned like purple stars, and the pink color crept, in spite of herself, to her cheeks, and stayed there. Somewhere, she knew, one man was watching her, and each moment the terror grew that some of their many friends would bring him to her and make it impossible for him to refuse to come.

Several times she caught the eyes of Ana regarding her curiously. It was the first time she had ever seen Raquel surrounded by men and bandying compliments, and looking, for all her nunlike white and black, like a royal creature at a puppet show. And Ana had a sort of triumph in noting that the eyes of Doña Angela also wandered to her hostess in a sort of petulant amaze at the supremacy of her, when she chose to unbend and radiate graciousness in that manner. For Raquel jested and laughed at the pretty phrases of caballeros murmured in her ear. She refused a brooch of emerald for the Virgin in the chapel, in exchange for the jasmine in her hair. She promised two men to say a rosary for their aching hearts, and she allowed the older men to kiss her hands. One looking at her said:

"You are Mexico come to life to-night, señora. Always I have thought it. But to-night I see it with my own eyes. Mexico has always that glory of the opal fires at the heart."

Angela Bryton saw and heard, and her own childish appeal appeared all at once cheap and of tinsel. The pearls and brocades of the woman she hated seemed to scorch her flesh, and she felt the truth of the petulant words she had said to Rafael: that the pearls had been tossed to her with the indifference of a queen. The owner of the casket could afford to stand serene and

gemless, with only the jasmine flower in her hair, and yet dominate.

A cold rage filled her as she realized what Raquel could mean to men if she cared. It would be as it was when they met first on the hill, always she would hold the middle of the road, if she was aroused to care. Up to that moment there had been a wild fancy of perhaps sailing away alone with the hastily gathered coin, and of stopping at no port for Rafael. She was half afraid of him and after all what could he do if she did elude him like that? But the sight of Raquel and her little court of admirers changed all that. The proud eyes should know all the humiliation one woman could cause another — all!

She looked for Rafael; at once she would tell him,— now, while the glory of the Mexican opal eclipsed the woman of the royal pearls! She was blind with anger to every other thing. But he had not yet appeared. He was dressing, and a gentleman came to claim her for a dance. The guitars were already sending harmonies through the open doors, and the people were gathering thick along the western corridors. The rest of the plaza and the inner court were deserted. Not even a pair of lovers strayed from the crowd as yet. Later, when the moon came up, they would gather courage, but the shadows of the corridors seemed

eerie retreats at night to any but souls oblivious to the world.

It was not night yet. The first star glimmered in the western sky, and to the east a soft radiance over San Juan Mountain marked the path where the moon would come. In the warm dusk the woman with the opal fires of Mexico in her heart slipped away from the gay groups and through the stillness of the padres' garden, under the sculptured face and serpent, and then to the place of the altar, where the shadows were always softest. She came swiftly, silently; she had an odd feeling of being followed by his thoughts. The altar was the one place of refuge surely — the altar!

But it was not. He stood there leaning against the pillar. She carried a tiny candle and a rosary. He watched her light other candles in the niche, thus outlining the carved saint with the long hair over her shoulders, and the draperies of crimson. Flowers were there, blood-red roses, and he saw it all in the soft glimmer of the candles; then, as she was about to kneel before them, he strode forward and caught her arm.

The golden rosary fell on the tiled floor between them, and she placed her other hand over his, in mute appeal.

"You shall not kneel at that altar," he commanded,

his voice scarcely raised above a whisper; "that much of you belongs to me. I will not go away from you with that memory of you in my mind; I will not!"

She was trembling, and dared not lift her eyes.

"You should not have touched me," she said, brokenly. "All those hours on the hill I did not touch you even once. Must the two of us be weaker than one?"

"Weak? Oh yes, I am weak to-night, or I should not be here — the weakness of a sick man who cannot help himself. It is the last time, Espiritu mia, so long as we live — so long as we live!"

She slipped the Aztec ring from her finger and gave it to him.

"I thought perhaps it was the ring that gave you power over my thoughts," she said, simply; "but it was not. Your heart beats here in my breast, and will till I die, or till you do. Take it back, keep it. After all, it was not the ring!"

Her voice was so low, so even, that he, hearing his own heart-beats at the mere sight of her, felt the sudden resentment of a sick man at what appeared to be her cold control of herself.

"Is it so easy for you, then?" he asked. "Like slipping a ring from your finger or a bracelet from your wrist, and putting it aside to wear no more?

Oh, God! If but for one minute you could know aught but the sweet cool love of the girl, or the nun, or the devotee!"

She caught her breath in a little shudder at the heart-call in his words, then put out her hand and looked at him as he had never seen her look.

"Don't touch me," she said, her tones tense with a final decision. "You think that I do not know — that I do not understand; yet you see me kneel *there!*" and she flung one eloquent hand to the Madalena of the roses. "It is the thought — the thought! That we live on different sides of the world will not change the fact that you live in me, and I in you. And it will be always — always! I do not understand? Yet I have locked my door at night and flung the key through the bars of the window, that I could not follow my heart and go to you wherever you were! I do not understand? Yet there have been days when I feared to mount my horse to ride alone, for fear the wild wish for you would grow stronger than I could bear, and I should ride to you, to you only, and — oh, Mother of God! — ask you to keep me there!"

Her voice broke in shuddering sobs, and she covered her face with her hands, sinking on her knees before the Madalena of the altar, the last crowned

saint left in the ruin. Her one hand was still extended to ward him off, but he caught it, held it, and drew her to him.

"You are mine by all that!" he muttered, scarce knowing what he said. "Do you think I shall leave you here after knowing the truth? Espiritu! The Indians named you rightly. Spirit of mine, there are no bonds of earth strong enough to keep me from you now. Come! Our world is together; the nights of the evil dreams have been lived through. Somewhere we shall find the sunshine."

The hand clasping hers she caught to her lips, but when he would have clasped her, she broke from him with a low moan of protest.

"I tell you this that you go away knowing that the real life of me is with you always," she said, and stood leaning against the altar of the saint. "Go now, and go quickly; for I tell you truly, if the day ever come again when I find myself like to follow you, I will come where I am now, and this will end it all."

From the bodice of her gown she drew the little dagger she had taken from the jewel-casket the day before.

"My life is not my own to live in my own way; it is bound by an oath to the dead, and there is no

"One Wordless Minute."

release, none — none! Go now. You know my heart and the madness of it. Forget me if you can,— but oh, beloved, not too quickly!"

He caught her to him and held her there. The world reeled about them for one wordless minute, and then he released her and walked out across where the tower of the temple had once been, and he knew he was leaving her forever. A horse was waiting. He had said he could ride best in the moonlight, and a little later the hoof-beats sounded through the strumming guitars, and she knew it was over! It was her sacrifice for the oath to the dead, and she sank prostrate in the shadow of the altar. The tiny candles glimmered and went out, yet still she lay there. The moon in its soft yellow light flooded the open space without, but did not touch her. She had found the rosary and clasped it, her lips against the cold pearl figure of the sculptured Christ.

And then two persons came toward her through the arch of the old sacristy, one in the velvet and gold lace of a Spanish grandee, and the other a shimmer of brocade and pearl-gemmed lilies.

"No, I will not go without it," the woman's voice was saying, petulantly, "not though a dozen boats waited! Yes, I can slip away after the dance. Have a horse ready. Dolly will be sleeping; she is the

greatest risk. But we can be out of sight of land long before the dawn breaks."

The man murmured some plea in her ear, and she turned away, shrugging her shoulders.

"The jewels first!" she said, with pretty decision. "The coin is a matter of course; we shall need that to live on. But the jewels—why not? Half of them belonged to your own family, and for the rest—well, you leave her enough to give the Church; that is all she lives for. Bring me the jewels at once: when I see them in my own hand, I am ready to promise everything."

"You are not afraid to wait here?"

"Yes, a little," she acknowledged. "It's a horrid, creepy place, but it's the one corner where no one else will come. I will wait for them here."

The woman prostrate before the Madalena arose to her feet and stood motionless in the shadow. Her hands were crossed unconsciously on her heart to quiet its beating. Her own sacrifice, then, was to go for nothing; the vow she had sworn to live for was to count for naught because of one little white vampire of a creature whose god was gold and jewels!

The crossed hands held the rosary and the dagger.

"They are here," said Rafael, returning after a few minutes, "all but the few the girls wear to-night.

There! They are at last in your own hands; and now—"

She slipped her white arm about his throat and kissed him on the mouth.

"And you will live in my way—not hers?" she said, with clinging sweetness. "You are not to be even Catholic with me? You have promised!"

"Thou art my only god, O little white one!" he said, and pressed her to his breast. "All the world can go to hell, so I have you! My soul I give into these little hands; my heart is under these little feet, which I kiss thus, and thus, and thus! Though Christ himself stood in the way, I would have you for myself!"

She laughed softly in her triumph.

"We shall be missed," she said at last. "Go that way to the plaza, and I will go by the old garden. These I will wrap up and carry in my own hands. Go,—oh, there will be other nights for kisses,—go now, quickly!"

She pushed him from her, and he obeyed, walking across the tiled floor in the moonlight, and out into the plaza, as Bryton had walked so short a time before. The woman with the casket stood an instant looking after him, and then raised the lid and lifted a handful of the gems, holding them up that the soft

light of the moon might add to the glow of rubies and the white fire of diamonds.

"All these, and his very soul besides!" she murmured, holding a necklace aloft to the moon's rays,—"his soul besides!"

And then a low strangled cry escaped her as the woman of the rosary and dagger came silently to her from the shadows and halted a moment beside her.

A little later the Padre Libertad was stopped in the corridor by Raquel. He had been watching the dancers, and was about to start south. Like Bryton, he meant to ride at night, instead of in the hot sun.

"Wait," she said, imperatively; "the chapel is open; I would confess before you go."

"But to-morrow—your own padre—"

"To-night," she said; "and I want no other padre."

"If you have remembered a sin—" he began, hesitatingly; but she interrupted.

"I think it is neither sin nor remorse," she said, quietly; "but it is you that must listen to me."

He closed the door behind them. Old Polonia crouched unnoticed beside it, and in perhaps ten minutes he came out again, and started to walk the road to the sea. Rafael saw him, and laughed at the queer crack-brained padre who preferred walking

"Things Known and Never Told"

to riding a good horse. Others laughed also, and the dance went on, until the partners of Doña Angela grew impatient, and a gay party with guitars started to encircle the plaza for her, singing love-songs of appeal as they went.

The white gleam of the brocaded gown caught the eyes of the singers, and then a great cry went up in the night, and the music of the dance ceased, and the people crowded about the dead woman on the altar steps, and the old Indios crossed themselves, and said in their own tongue:

"It has come, after all,—the sacrifice of blood on the altar of the temple,—the thing our fathers told us has come to pass."

The strings of pearls and other jewels were scattered on the diamond-shaped tiles of the floor, and many were red with blood.

"Some one has tried to steal the jewels while we all danced there," suggested one of the guests, "and she has died defending them. Rafael, she has given her life to save the jewels of your wife!"

"Yes," Rafael said, at last, and stared at the speaker in a dazed way; "my wife. I—I will go to my wife."

He strode through the crowd toward the living-rooms, and flung wide the door of her chamber. She was on her knees where Padre Libertad had left her.

"Raquel!"

His voice sounded hollow and strange in his own ears. A strange buzzing in his head blurred speech and thought, and when she arose and faced him with clear eyes and quiet face, he leaned against the chair and looked at her strangely — helplessly.

"She is dead," he said, thickly; "Angela Bryton is found dead — and your jewels —"

"Wait," she said, "and I will go with you."

And turning, she lifted the lid from the perfumed box of candles.

"She did not believe in these," she said, quietly, "but we will light them for her, just the same. None of us knew whom they would burn for; perhaps she knows now, Rafael."

He made no answer, but moved like a man stunned mentally. Out beside her he walked to the altar-place, and the people made way for them.

It was the hour of dawn when a fisherman rode from the beach to tell how he had found two sailors beaten and bound at the landing-place. They had a story of a sailing-vessel and sacks of coin, and a bearded man who looked like El Capitan; but it must have been his ghost, for it was thought Capitan was dead, as well as Juan Flores. At any rate, the vessel was gone, and the sailors were left tied on the shore.

They were afraid to face Rafael Arteaga, because of the coin he had trusted them with, and the good boat, gone now straight out of sight — the saints and the devil only knew where!

But they needed not to fear Rafael. The coin, for which he had exchanged all the cattle and horses possible to sell in two days' time, was a forgotten thing to him, or uncared for. He sat apart and silent, as though paralyzed by a great fear, and he ever followed Raquel Arteaga with his eyes, and said nothing.

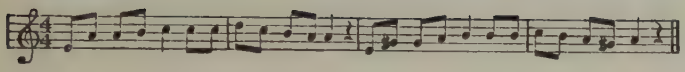
The people wondered much that the robbers who would kill a woman and steal a boat had not stopped also to gather up the scattered jewels strewn about her. But they had not. Not even a diamond was missing. They were gathered from the tiles, and the blood was washed from them, and the casket was taken to Raquel by Ana, who was almost as silent as Rafael. On that subject, never in their lives would they gain courage to speak. Raquel took the casket, and looked at the gems, but did not touch them.

"And for such trifles she lost her life, perhaps her soul — who knows?" she said, in the same colorless quiet way, and handed the casket to her husband. "Rafael, have these put away for her child, when she becomes a woman. They were paid for by the mother!"

From that night Rafael Arteaga was a changed man. Some said he had gone mad at the death of the woman there; others said that it was not the death of the woman, but the curse of the Arteagas had fallen upon him. No one ever heard him laugh or sing again; and when his wife brought pretty Marta's little boy from the willows, and had him educated to inherit after his father, the father accepted him almost without notice.

Keith Bryton never came back. Letters concerning the child of Doña Angela were exchanged with Don Eduardo, who remained her guardian, and after that there were long years of silence. Only one man, far down the coast of South America, guessed what Raquel Arteaga lived through. Even to Ana, who had left her own land to join him, there were some things known to him of the old Mission days, and never told.

Al Fin



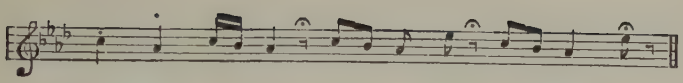
CHAPTER XXII

RAQUEL knelt no more at the shrine of the Madalena, but she went there nightly as the afterglow flooded the valley. Sometimes she rode her horse alone up the dusk shadows of Trabuco, past the portal of the aliso tree and into the inner court of memory. But always she kept the tryst of the first star of nightfall.

When the years of the great war of the East came, she knew he was there. And when, after a battle called "Chickamauga," there came a tiny package from that far-away place, she stood in the dusk of the old temple, and slipped the ring of the Aztec eagle again on her finger. Then she knew that the end of the separation had come.

"If it were any other woman than you, Raquel Arteaga, men would say you rode to meet a lover,

when you gallop like that in the night, and come back looking as if you had just been kissed," said Teresa, with watchful malice. "The old Indios say that you bathe in the night dews as a charm to keep young always. But why do you ride alone?"

"Alone?" The woman who the old courtier had said held the opal fires of Mexico in her heart smiled on her sister-in-law at that question, and the dusk shadows of night and mystery were in her violet eyes. "I am never alone now, Teresa. It is a long time since I felt alone, a very long time."

THE END